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THE
LIFE OF ELISHA,
IN
ELEVEN PLAIN PRACTICAL DISCOURSES.

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P R E F A C E.

THE following Discourses were delivered to a Village Congregation, and the spiritual interests of a Parochial Minister's own charge are, under God, primarily intended in their publication.

G. L. G.

Ewell, Surrey, Dec. 18, 1856.



THE LIFE 'OF ELISHA.

No. I.

THE CALL OF ELISHA.

1 KINGS XIX. 19—21.

“ So he departed thence, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth: and Elijah passed by him, and cast his mantle upon him. And he left the oxen, and ran after Elijah, and said, Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee. And he said unto him, Go back again: for what have I done to thee? And he returned back from him, and took a yoke of oxen, and slew them, and boiled their flesh with the instruments of the oxen, and gave unto the people, and they did eat.

B

Then he arose, and went after Elijah, and ministered unto him."

"Ἄρκει σοι ἡ χάρις μου."

ELIJAH was drawing near the end of his course ; he had yet, indeed, a few years to live—a few more noble manifestations of God's power and God's favour to enact, and then he was to be honoured with a peculiar transit to Heaven, a foreshadowing of the glorious ascension of the Messiah, of whom he was a faithful prophet and forerunner. But the work was not to end with him ; there was work prepared for another, and another, and yet another, in the Lord's vineyard, and the prophet was now to be advertised of his successor—of the individual who should step into his place and carry forward the gracious purposes of Jehovah to his believing people ; and such an intimation would be profitable in many ways. It would be *profitable to Elijah* ; it would remind him of his frailty—of “ all flesh

being as grass, and all the goodness thereof as a flower of the field" (Isa. xl. 6); that, while the power of God rested upon him, he carried that power in an "earthen vessel," liable to be shivered to atoms at any moment. It would be *profitable to his successor*; he would benefit by the teaching, example, and experience, and would enjoy the society of an eminent servant of God; and it would be *profitable to the people*, for they would benefit by the ministry of one who had companied with the greatest prophet of the day, who had imbibed his mind and spirit, and on whom, as we shall presently see, a double portion of that spirit would descend. The whole passage, then, discovers to us the call of Elisha instrumentally by Elijah, according to the Lord's command in the sixteenth verse of the chapter—"And Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room." Here, then, we begin where Scripture

begins with the life of Elisha; and may the Spirit of the Father, who divideth to every man severally as He will, pour into all our souls the riches of his grace, for Jesus Christ's sake!

Elisha is introduced to our notice in a very brief manner. We have merely the information *who* his father was—one Shaphat; *where* he lived—at Abel-meholah; and what was his position—a wealthy *agriculturist*, having twelve yoke or teams of oxen, “and he with the twelfth.” (Ver. 19.) And yet this is more than was told us of Elijah, who comes suddenly on the scene as one dropping from the clouds, and concerning whom we only learn that he was the Tishbite, a native of a town of that name, and one of the inhabitants of Gilead. Behold, then, Elisha thus happily and usefully employed on his farm, doing his duty in that station of life in which it had pleased God to place him, when he finds himself suddenly arrested in his labours by a wayfaring traveller,

who “passed by him, and cast his mantle upon him.” (Ver. 19.) It was none other than Elijah—Elijah, of whose exploits at the foot of Carmel the whole country was now ringing,—Elijah, whose miraculous triumph over the prophets of Baal had rejoiced the hearts of the faithful in the land, and revived their hopes for the emancipation of Israel from the idolatrous position into which the worship of the golden calves had precipitated them. Elisha was, doubtless, one of those who had heard of the prophet’s doings; he had listened attentively to the account, if he had not himself been a spectator, of the discomfiture of Baal’s ministers; he had admired the courageous faith of Elijah, and had, perhaps, experienced many an inward impulse of sympathy and affection for him and his work. The all-wise and all-seeing God has many ways of preparing the hearts of those He calls to his service; but we may observe this *one* feature—they are seen *to be at work when He visits*

them. An idle soul is the devil's workshop, and has no place for the Spirit's breath. Our Lord's apostles were following their trade, as Elisha was his, when Jesus said unto them, "Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men." (Mark i. 17.) And another feature is, that the Lord is never deceived in his man; He ever knows the capacity and the fitness of whomsoever He employs, and so in His infinite wisdom and foreknowledge prepares the man for the place, and the place for the man. We should bear this in mind in such a *call as this*; we should give Jehovah the glory of his providential dealing; and so, by applying it to our own case and circumstances, wait for the manifestation of his foreseeing *calculations*, even as his people of old waited for the moving of the cloud, in the believing persuasion that "as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." (Rom. viii. 14.) This was the case with Elisha. God knew his

man—his man received the call as one prepared to accept it. He was not “ disobedient unto the heavenly vision ” (Acts xix. 19), for such in reality it was. And here let me enlarge a little on another truth connected with such a call. Did Elisha call to Elijah ? Did he arrest his steps as he passed by his farm ? Did he say, Stop, listen, I am anxious to enter the Lord’s service ; I would now cast in my lot among the prophets, and am prepared to follow thee ? No ; we do not find any such application on the part of Elisha. Elijah approached Elisha before Elisha moved one step toward him. Hence we learn it is God who first calls to us ere we ever call upon Him. We are utterly unable to “ turn and prepare ourselves by our own natural strength and good works to faith and calling upon God ” (Article X.), simply because we have no will thereto till the Spirit implants it ; we have no desires that way till the Lord creates them, no tendencies

upward till there have been outpourings downward; it is when "the earth drinketh in the rain which cometh oft upon it that it bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, and receiveth blessing from God." (Heb. vi. 7.) So it is when men's souls have been visited with the dew of God's Spirit that they begin to call upon Him. Realize this truth, beloved brethren; let it warn the self-sufficient and self-satisfied who deem it within the compass of their own will to turn to the Lord, and to serve Him when and how they please. Let it comfort the weak and faint-hearted that if they feel within themselves any, the *very least* inclination to follow the Lord and to enter his service, it is the work of the Holy Spirit moving and constraining their wills to the strait and narrow path of life. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above." (James i. 17.)

Let us next mark the manner in which

Elisha received this call. We have supposed that the call did not reach an unprepared heart—that there were sparks kindled in Elisha's breast which only needed the fanning of God's Spirit to yield a flame; but it does not therefore follow that all opposing influences were stayed—that nothing within him moved to quench the spark—that no parental regards, or kindred feelings, or home associations stirred his natural affections, and drew a pang at parting with all he had loved and all which the “heart that knoweth its own bitterness” can only fully appreciate. Such allowable regrets, such genial feelings cannot be stifled in a moment; and their strong abiding place—their existence in the full measure of dutiful affection and of social loving-kindness in Elisha is seen in his tender plea to the strait requirement of Elijah, “Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee.” (Ver. 20.) Elisha would hardly obtain

the cordial approval his self-denying conduct demands had it been otherwise. The heart of man rebels against the thought that a *God of love* wills the *want of love* in any single part of his creation. Love is woven into the whole texture of his works as well as his word. It is a perversion of a religion of love to teach that God's service and home affections are ever at variance. It was the Pharisees who inculcated the hateful doctrine that "whoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me: and honour not his father or his mother, he shall be free" (Matt. xv. 4), he shall be blameless. It is the corrupters and perverters of a religion of love at the present day who untie the social bonds of love—who preach up the superior sanctity of celibacy and recluse retirement, and invite, and persuade, and hold out the inducement of eternal life to any who will lay all they have on the altar of God, although

at the cost of every social claim and rightful interest. The reply of Elijah is a confirmation of this truth—"Go back again, for what have I done to thee?" (ver. 20)—have I required of thee to rend the bonds of social existence?—have I demanded an unnatural sacrifice?—hath the God I serve any delight in cruelly severing the very ties which He hath formed for the morality and happiness of his creatures?—hath He any wish to dash the cup of virtuous bliss from the lips, and to put an extinguisher upon the very affections which He hath constituted an essential part of man's being? *No*; it is not so. "Go back again," and fulfil thy praiseworthy purpose; satisfy thy parents that thou art not changed in natural affection because thou hast given thine heart to the Lord, but show practically that He who said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind" (Matt. xxii. 37), said also, "Honour thy

father and thy mother, that it may be well with thee." (Eph. vi. 2, 3.) Believe this, beloved brethren, that the Gospel of Christ never requires aught of its followers that is inconsistent with the due claims of humanity and of social relationship. It expressly teaches the enlightened soul that every longing of love, every outgoing of affection, is permissible, so long as it is subservient to the love and glory and service of Him, by whose fiat alone such enjoyments are realized; and it is only when the selfishness of man would shut out God—it is only when those exquisite sensibilities of family life are all partaken of, and the Lord driven into a corner, or altogether lost sight of, that a justly indignant and insulted Father pours down his withering curse on such a family or such a tie, and declares without mistake that men and women shall not be happy *without Him*; and it is only when such things prevail—it is only when the heart of double-

dealing, or hypocrisy, or indecision, or indifference is seen by Him who reads every heart that the stern demand on a parallel occasion is elicited to one who asked the mild and loving Saviour, "Suffer me first to go and bury my father" (Luke ix. 59), "Let the dead bury their dead, but go thou and preach the kingdom of God."

And here may we not advisedly contrast for a moment the different spirit in which such demands are met when made by the Lord and when made by the world. See the parent suffering his child in the bloom of youth to pass from his roof at the call of the civil or military service of his country, and see the anxious mother's reluctant consent, won from her sorrowful heart, when the delight of her eyes is taken away at the very moment that he is entering on the beauty of youthful manhood. There are no obstacles cast in the way here—no if's, and but's, and gloomy anticipations—no

friends and neighbours descant at large on the sacrifice, and the risk, and the want of prudence and of common sense, ending with the declaration of its being a clear case of enthusiasm; all is bright and sunshine in the main, and whatever ties have to be rent and feelings to be wrought upon, the purpose is considered very right and very proper. But let the scene change—let the same child be proposed for a missionary college, with a view to his becoming a missionary soldier, and in what a different light is the prospect viewed, and in what an opposite spirit is the proposal met? So Elisha “returned back,” to take a suitable farewell of home duties; he accepted the reply of Elijah in the spirit in which it was intended; he had a feast prepared, and invited his friends and dependants to partake of its bounties, indicating the freedom and happiness of his heart in contemplation of his new service. And one important instruction we may gather

from this incident in the call of Elisha is this, that the efficacy of God's grace in nowise interferes with the native *liberty of man's will*. "Go back again: what have I done unto thee?" Here is the *proffered and accepted exercise of a free will*. Its agency is not interrupted; he carries out his will to the extent his mind prompts; there is no compulsion offered, no violence employed; he follows the bent of his own feelings, and we only see the moving power of Divine grace in the voluntary consent he yields to the call, even as it is written, "*Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power.*" (Ps. cx. 3.) It is wise, beloved, to deal with Scripture as we *find* it. We have to do therein with *facts* as well as *doctrine*, with *practice* as well as *opinion*; and it is not man's business, I apprehend, whether as a minister or a layman, to weary his own mind or the minds of others with the vain attempt to make every statement in God's Word square with

a preconceived system. This has been the bane of every theological school since the Fall; it has been the source of all the bitter and endless controversy which has agitated Christendom since the Lord came; it is a bar in the way of studying the Bible with profit, with comfort, with enjoyment; it is as a fog and a mist and a cloud which obscures the piercing light of the Sun of Righteousness, and fetters the mind, prejudices the spirit, narrows the conception, and, too often, sours the heart. I do not, therefore, consider it my part or your part to concern our mind how God's *constraining* call and Elisha's *free liberty* of will are to be reconciled. I do not, indeed, see the need of any reconciliation. I take the narrative as I find it, and all is clear and satisfactory. I see plainly that Jehovah called Elisha by his prophet ere Elisha called to Jehovah. I see it was an *immediate call*. I see Elisha pleaded a temporary delay, obtained and exercised

it, and “then he arose, and went after Elijah, and ministered to him.” (Ver. 21.) And what more do we want? What have we to do with diving into the recesses of Elisha’s heart? What concern have we in the profitless inquiry, Where was the *turning-point* in that heart? Is not the record plain, useful, and conclusive as a matter of fact; and can it be my business or your business to turn and twist it to an adopted system—to make it fit where it does not seem to fit with our favourite theory—and, lest that theory should suffer an atom in its due proportions, to cripple and impair the full force of clear and admitted statements? Rather be it ever ours, beloved brethren, to receive, mark, and learn of, every sentence in God’s *written* Word with a *fearless* and yet reverential mind; with a firm faith, a sure trust, a confident persuasion that the Holy Ghost will use it as a two-edged sword in converting, building up, and sanctifying

wholly our bodies and souls in righteousness.

There is one more feature in Elisha's call on which I would dwell a moment in conclusion. The text says, "He arose, went after Elisha, and *ministered* unto him." Now we learn incidentally from another passage that this was a *real servitude*, that it had respect to all the duties and occasions of a personal waiting upon the prophet; for we read (2 Kings iii. 11), when Jehoshaphat, King of Judah, and Joram, King of Israel, and the King of Edom, were acting in union against Moab, one of the servants, in reply to an inquiry of Jehoshaphat's, "Is there not here a prophet of the Lord?" replied, "Here is Elisha, the son of Shaphat, which poured water on the hands of Elijah"—a phrase well understood to signify the condition of a servitor, and, from the circumstances under which it was uttered, not improbably designed to cast contempt upon the man of God as having exercised that

menial office to the far-famed Elijah. And what an insight does this fact afford to the self-denying humility of Elisha ! The son of a wealthy agriculturist, having servants under him, to move here and there at *his* bidding, and looked up to as the heir of the estate, becomes the ministering follower of one who, like the Messiah of whom he prophesied, and testified, had often nowhere to lay his head, but, as his history tells us, was hunted at times from place to place, with a price set upon his person. (1 Kings xviii. 10.) Elisha exchanged plenty for poverty, a comfortable independence for an arduous and dependant position—as, however, in our Lord's day, many cast in their lot with the despised Nazarene, and wandered with Him, hungry and thirsty, over the wild mountain, on the arid plain, or across the troubled sea ; and of these, not only poor fishermen, but some of Herod's household, who “ ministered to Him of their substance ” (Luke viii. 3) ; so this

young man was content to give up much of this world's expectation, consideration, and comfort, to wait upon, and to sit at the feet of, the most honoured prophet of his day; for "he had respect unto the recompense of the reward." (Heb. xi. 26.)

And here, then, in taking leave of the call of Elisha, let us lay to heart the spirit in which he entered the Lord's service. It was a spirit of *self-denial* and *humility*: of *self-denial*, in that he surrendered things desirable and esteemed of men; and of *humility*, in that, in the mind of the great Prophet of prophets, according to his measure and the grace given him, he humbled himself and became a servant for the *kingdom of God's* sake. Are there any anxious souls present—any oppressed with doubts of their acceptance, with misgivings of God's pardoning mercy and forgiveness of their sins? Examine yourself on this point,—What is the spirit of my mind? What self-denial am I exercising in the Lord's

behalf? What have I ever surrendered for his sake? I have yielded many things, it may be, in man's behalf; but what have I given up in the Lord's behalf? Where is to be seen the sacrifice of any time, any talents, any money, for the Lord's single *glory* and *benefit*? Should a blank, or anything approaching a *blank*, be recorded against me? Can I be surprised at the want of assurance? Can I expect paternal love to flow in upon my earthly state in a like case? or would I get any assurance of goodwill from an earthly master in such circumstances? Remember, brethren, "the heart is deceitful above all things; who can know it?"

Then, as to *humbleness* of mind. Has a providential opening of usefulness been proffered, and has it met with a refusal, because of its lowering tendency? Have I looked down upon it, and has my pride of heart stumbled at that stumbling-block? and yet am I sorrowful, yet am I

cast down, because I have no comfortable feeling of the Lord's presence in my soul? But can I really *wonder* at this? Can I wonder that He who washed his disciples' feet has no sympathy with my present state of mind, but leaves me to feel the destitution of his presence, on purpose that I may be humbled under the mighty hand of God?

Are there any *indolent souls* here? souls who have experienced wholesome convictions, and have had some warm affections; but their condition, in the main, is a sleepy condition. They are strangers to acts of *real* self-sacrifice and self-denial for Christ's sake; they have no objection to listen to the self-denying *labours* of others, and they can admire the zeal of an Elijah, or the self-denial of an Elisha; but they are unaccustomed to the thought, they repudiate the notion, "*Go thou, and do likewise.*" Let the stirring example of Elisha awake you out of *sleep*. Let this conviction take hold of your *mind*. "As

he was in this *world*,” so are you; and the Lord expects you to answer the call of his ministers, to go work in his vineyard now even as then. There are multitudes of souls “dead in trespasses and sins” everywhere, at home and abroad, and the labourers for the Lord’s vineyard are few; and the feeling sense of how few is not less practically realized by the children of God now than it was in the days of Moses, when, in contemplation of such a scarcity, he heartily exclaimed, “Would God that all the Lord’s people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his Spirit upon them!” (Numb. xi. 29.)

No. II.

ELISHA LOSES HIS MASTER.

2 KINGS II. 11, 12.

“And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. And Elisha saw it, and he cried, My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof.”

“Αρκεῖ σοι ἡ χάρις μου.”

THIS is the first occasion on which Elisha is introduced to our notice since his sudden but decisive call to the official service of Jehovah, in 1 Kings xix. That call assigned him the honoured position of being a successor to Elijah, who was

himself the instrument of the summons to the son of Shaphat. Several years had passed over their heads since Elisha had been removed from the sowing of the *natural seed* in the fields of his father's domain, to the sowing of the *spiritual seed* in the schools of the prophets, and during this period he doubtless assiduously attended his master, drinking in of his spirit, and qualifying himself for future work; and, if we may transfer the requirements of an apostle under the Gospel to a prophet under the law, then the young minister will have earned, and, if we may judge from his after eminence, *well earned*, the assurance of Paul to Timothy, "They that have used the office of a deacon *well* purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus." (1 Tim. iii. 13.) The narrative connected with the text may impress our minds with this, among other salutary reflections, viz., the firm attachment of Elisha to the teacher at whose

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feet, like a Paul with a Gamaliel, he had been privileged to sit, as also his fidelity to the righteous cause with which he was now so thoroughly identified. “Having put his hand to his” new “plough,” he never for an instant “looked back.” (Luke ix. 62.) This firm attachment is to be seen in his *affection* to man, his *faith* to God, and in the recompense which ever follows a faithful and diligent learner. May the Holy Spirit bless a few words on these several points to all our souls !

I. Let us mark Elisha’s good *affection* to man. This is evidenced in his devoted attachment to his master—an attachment which prompts the determination never to leave him in this world. It appears plain from the narrative, that the very day, if not the hour, of Elijah’s removal had been revealed to the sons of the prophets, and was now anticipated by them. “And the sons of the prophets that were at Beth-el came forth to Elisha, and said

unto him, Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head *to-day?* And he said, I know it." (Ver. 3.) And we may feel assured, therefore, that the chief person concerned, Elijah, was graciously taught and prepared for the end; and, under these circumstances, he deems it better—better for the sparing of his own and his successor's feelings—that they should separate prior to the final event. When a Christian man has to start on his last journey to his Father's home, he knows he must take that journey alone. No other human being, the *nearest* in affinity, or the dearest in affection, can possibly accompany him. Every one must feel it is a solemn as well as an anxious time, and he may well desire to be much alone, and in communion with the blessed Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Such might have been Elijah's mind and desire; but there were reasons for the glory of God, and for the benefit of survivors, for its being otherwise ordered.

Elisha perseveres in keeping close to the departing prophet, and nothing will shake his determination. “Tarry here, I pray thee,” is the remonstrance of Elijah, *thrice* repeated at *three several* times and places, at Gilgal, Bethel, and Jericho ; and thrice is the loving appeal reiterated in reply, “As the Lord *liveth*, and as thy soul *liveth*, *I will not* leave thee.” (Vers. 1, 2, 4.) What can stand in the way of a firm and affectionate *resolution*? Love can break all bands asunder, and achieve conquests that gold or violence can never realize. But all earthly props must fail in time. *We* are to be *torn* from them, or *they* from us, were it only to teach the lesson of leaning *entirely* upon our God ; and let faith stay itself upon the fact that the separation shall never be put in force one moment sooner than the wisdom of a covenant Father in Christ sees good. Elijah’s faith and Elijah’s experience would realize this ; he would feel that his faithful follower was about

to lose his earthly director, as the mind of the other prophets expressed it, "Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy *head* to-day?" and therefore he will not mar the few moments spared for further counsel and advice. He yields to the strong attachment of Elisha; he says, in so many words, "Thou shalt be with me even to the end;" and, as an expression of his confidence, and of Elisha's pre-eminence over the rest, when they had reached the Jordan, and fifty prophets are standing "to view afar off" (ver. 7), he "took his mantle, and wrapped it together, and smote the waters, and they were divided hither and thither, so that they two went over together on dry ground." (Ver. 8.) And so, beloved, shall the believer, dying out of *this* world, find the waters of his Jordan to be rendered passable by the presence of the Spirit of Christ, who "by his death hath overcome death," and

opened to his faithful followers “the gate of everlasting life.”

II. But let us mark, next, how the good affection of Elisha to his revered master was founded on *faith in his God*. He might rejoice in the company of Elijah, he might find solace in the sympathy, and enjoy the communications of his gifted mind; but his chief aim and end is the *glory of the Eternal*, and his faith works by love to Him, and a commendable anxiety presses his spirit to be even more abundant in labours and usefulness than Elijah himself; and therefore his intelligent and strictly humble desire is that, while he may walk and act in the very same mind which actuated Elijah, a yet *larger measure of inward strength* and fervent zeal may be vouchsafed to his prayer. And his departing friend and head seems to foresee the movings of his pupil’s mind and the upward risings of his heart, when he now graciously gives

him a last proof of his regard and esteem by the considerate question, “Ask what I shall do for thee, *before I be taken away from thee.*” (Ver. 9.) Then is the growing faith and spirituality of the young disciple seen in the petition, “Let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me.” I would follow in thy steps, and, if it may be, with increasing benefit to the Church at large. How is the soul of the young minister filled with ample desires, and yet not a whit more ample than God could and *would supply!* We are often straitened in our prayers; but He is never straitened in his *answers.*

And let us notice, in passing, how entirely the mind of Elijah is free from that fond conceit and deadly error which has crept over so great a part of professing Christendom, viz., that the *saints* in heaven *can* and *do* intercede for the *saints* on earth. “Ask what I shall do for thee, *before I be taken away from thee?*” (Ver. 9.) There is much instruction in

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the little word *before*. It was as much as to say, Now is the moment when I can be of use; now “the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man” can avail much (James v. 16): but it must be *now*, “*before* I am taken away from thee;” for certainly there “is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave” (Eccl. ix. 10), wherewith I shall be able to do thee any service.

Let us further dwell awhile here on the admirable spirit which now animated these *two great men*. The younger, indeed, wished to be useful and more efficient and more indefatigable, if it might be, than his *predecessor*; but the desire was unaccompanied by the least *spark* of rivalry; there was no jealousy, or envy, or vain desire of personal superiority in his request. It is very gratifying to observe the total absence of any such base and low-born motives in either. Elijah is not disturbed by the zealous petition of his junior; no feelings of

irritated rivalry cross his mind; he will be glad and rejoice if his successor can be twice the man he is, and have double his wisdom, knowledge, and practical success. He throws no cold *water* to quench the live coal burning in the ardent bosom of his disciple. He does, indeed, say, "Thou hast asked a *hard thing*" (ver. 10); but he gives him, at the same time, reason to hope it might be granted: "Nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be *so* unto thee." (Ver. 10.)

And may we not all learn a very necessary and profitable truth from this incident, viz., that, whether as ministers or laymen, in whatever we undertake in our several positions of duty and usefulness, we should ever seek the glory of God and the good of society at large, as the primary point, and not our own petty advancement and pre-eminence. How contemptible, how degrading, and yet how common is it to see a contrary spirit,

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like unto a Diotrephes ! How easy is it for the penetrating eye of any tolerable discerner of character to detect self-advancement and self-exaltation at the bottom of all that is done !—if it be the orator, to command the *Legislature* of the country ; if it be the diplomatist, to excel in tact and ability all his compeers ; if it be the author, to write the book that shall prove the most acceptable ; if it be the physician, to grasp the largest practice ; if it be the merchant, to be at the top of the Exchange ; if it be the banker, to have the monied interest in check ; if it be the agriculturist, to surpass his neighbour ; if it be the shopkeeper, to get all the custom ; and if, alas ! it be the *minister*, to make the best speech at a Meeting, or *preach* the best sermon in the pulpit. Each, in his way, “ seeks his own, not the things of Jesus Christ.” Thus there is *private* instead of *public* good, narrow and contracted instead of wide and large-hearted benevolence, and

the *uprising* of self at the expense of the *downsetting* of another.

How gratifying, then, how refreshing is it to see the lofty and generous spirit which animated Elijah and Elisha ! Both were influenced by *one principle*, both had one intent, one wish at heart ;—it was singly and solely the *glory of God*. Elisha had no desire for superiority over Elijah. It was *general usefulness*, and not *personal pre-eminence*, that urged him to press forward ; and we note that, at the very moment when his prayer is granted, and he sees Elisha passing into the heavens, his deep sense of his own and of his country's loss is shown by the sensitive cry, “ My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof.” (Ver. 12.) And then Elijah had no jealousy of his *successor's advancement*, for he entered readily into his disciple's ardent aspirations, and not a word of remonstrance or a semblance of disapproval flows from his lips.

Let a like spirit be sought and cultivated by all, and what an amount of good, in a *temporal sense*, would the public experience, would the community at large reap, if every private individual would set aside his own likings and preferences and self-pushings, and give himself in earnest to promote the social advancement! What an amount of good, in a *spiritual sense*, would be accomplished for the conversion of souls, and the uplifting of a crucified Lord in any given locality, if each one would determine to do, *not what he or she would*, but what he or she *could*, to promote the interests of truth, of temperance, and of righteousness! Let each one present institute a searching scrutiny into the *motives* which are the spring of their daily *sayings and doings*. Let a little *time*—and it will be time well spent, be given to heart *examination*, how far self *is encouraged*, how far self *rules*, how far self prevails over fair suggestions, and crushes often in a

few moments noble purposes of disinterested good, of generous sympathy, or of exalted love, which have flitted across the mind, but have no more solidity than a dream which remaineth for a little while and then vanisheth away. Let each one ask, What will be the end of my daily thoughts, daily conversations, daily proceedings ? Can they possibly be a nonentity ? Has not my every thought, word, and work, an influence on myself or another ? What will then be the sum of them ? How will they read when the books are opened, and "the dead are judged out of those things which are *written* in the books, according to *their works* ?" (Rev. xx. 12.) Is this a fact ? Is it a reality that my daily imaginations, daily words, daily doings, are all written down in the book of God's remembrance ? It is a *fact*, it is a *reality*. Does it appear impossible that such a record should be kept of the *millions upon millions* of souls that *have lived*, are

living, and yet shall *live* on this earth ? What is *impossible with* God ? He that made this wondrous creation, and man the greatest wonder in it, out of a mass of crude elements, cannot He do all things ? Where is the limit to the power of such a Being ? What is beyond the word of the Most High ? Think of *Him with whom we have to do.*

III. I have to notice the recompense which ever follows a faithful and diligent learner. Elisha had proved an apt scholar as well as a devoted attendant upon Elijah, and it was now to be seen that, by such a conduct, he had “ purchased to himself a *good degree.*” Elijah had assured him, “ If thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so *unto* thee.” (Ver. 10.) Elisha was favoured with the sight,—he *did* behold with his eyes the *translation of Elijah.* “ And it came to pass, as they two went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them

both asunder ; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. And *Elisha saw it.*" (Ver. 11.) Now then, is the thought of *his mind*,—Now that I have lost my protector and teacher, and need more palpably than I have ever yet experienced the strength and presence of that God who never *failed him*, now let me prove the reality of the *promised gift*. Let me see that, in the last assurance of my departed father, I am not disappointed. The thought is instantly in action. "He took up the mantle of Elijah that fell from him" (ver. 13), and went back to Jordan, and smote the waters, and said, "Where is the *Lord God of Elijah?*" The appeal is made, how momentous the waiting for the result ! Seconds seem hours while the eye of the prophet wanders across the mass of dark waters ; the suspense is brief, the appeal is heard, the last petition of Elijah is accepted ; the Spirit descends in due measure, the God of

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Elijah answers the call. “*Here am I,*” is the reply. The waters “are parted hither and thither, and Elisha went over.” (Ver. 14.)

Thus the first act of Elisha’s ministry is so arranged as to exhibit the same mighty power and divine presence which had characterized the final miracle of his predecessor, and this solemn inauguration to his office is done in the view of that College of Prophets over whom he was now to preside; and the effect was immediate and decisive, for “when the sons of the prophets which were to view at Jericho saw him, they said, The spirit of Elijah doth rest upon Elisha. And they came to meet him, and bowed themselves to the ground before him.” (Ver. 15.) This honour put on Elisha, this recompence to his faith and love, this reward of his *persevering earnestness* in his duties, offers a word of encouragement to all beginners. It speaks in audible terms, “*Covet earnestly the best gifts*” (1 Cor.

xii. 31); be not disheartened at *difficulties*; press on in grace; *persevere*, read, mark, learn, and digest; and then *believe* that assuredly you will not run *in vain*.

I would specially impress the example of Elisha on all young people. Look out of yourselves. Be not troubled about your own capacities, question not your fitness for any work in the Lord's vineyard to which you are called, but, when you have a clear invitation to a *duty*, remember the strength and faithfulness of him who has given you the opening. Let all diffident scruples, and all unreadiness, fall back upon this promise, "*I am with you.*" (Hag. i. 13; Matt. xxviii. 20.) There is a species of erroneous hesitation which hinders many from being as useful as they *might* and *ought* to be, and I am afraid, if traced to its first risings,—if all the turnings and shiftings of the mind were analyzed and exposed,—a measure of *distrust*, particles of pride, germs of

unbelief, and even undetected, yet prevalent *indolence*, would one or other stand forth as the spokes in the wheel. Let all beginners, then, in good things, in any service of love and gratitude to the Saviour who has bought you with *His own precious blood*, think much of this rule, "*My grace is sufficient for thee.*" (2 Cor. xii. 9.) "Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain." (Zech. iv. 7.) If you hesitate, and falter, and look here and there when a call of usefulness is plainly offered, you are but giving place to *the devil*, and the call, to his triumph, but your *confusion*, may never be repeated.

How many present may, if they please, remember occasions of this *kind*? You might have been useful, you missed the opportunity, you remained *useless*; you might have advanced, you stood still, you have gone *backward*; you might have had a double portion of *spiritual gifts*, your faith faltered in the *seeking*,

you have not so many as *you once had*. Think much, very much of the rule, “ My grace is sufficient for thee.”

And now, although our subject has chiefly to do with Elisha, I cannot quit the last scene of Elijah’s life without dwelling a moment on the type which his glorious ascension affords of the ascension of Jesus. The parallel holds good in two points,—the *calmness and self-possession* of the individual, and the spiritual blessing *which immediately followed*. How calm and collected was Elijah. He goes on in pleasing and profitable converse with his companion to the very end. “ And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire.” (Ver. 11.) So our blessed Lord was in happy communion with his disciples even to the end. “ And when He had spoken these things, while *they beheld*, He was taken up.” (Acts i. 9.) They saw Him go, as Elisha did Elijah, and may not this suggest to the

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people of God a *happy departure*? However strange or painful may be the outward circumstances of that departure, still it shall be a *happy departure*. The Lord may sometimes decree a *fiery passage*, but the end thereof shall be certainly blessed.

Let not any who love Jesus Christ be ever alarmed at the prospect of death. Come when or how it may it shall be well, even as the heart-stricken Shunammite admitted, when she had lost her only son,—“It is well.” (2 Kings iv. 26.) He, the Lord Christ, who has destroyed him that had the power of death, even the devil, will assuredly be with thee, and make thy *translation*, for it is nothing more, from time to eternity, safe and happy. And what a word of remonstrance does this convey to the unconverted! You, who “through fear of death, are all your life long subject to bondage” (Heb. ii. 15), why will you persevere in unbelief and sin? Why do

you suffer your lusts to overcome your reason ? and your self-indulgence your better feelings ? You often hope or wish that you "may die the death of the righteous, and your last end be like his ;" how can it be unless you *live the life of the righteous*? May the Lord grant you "repentance to the acknowledgment of the truth ! "

Let us all mark, also, the spiritual blessings which immediately followed upon Elijah's translation as a type of that of *Jesus*. The spirit of *promise* descended on Elisha, and he clave asunder the waters of Jordan with the touch of Elijah's mantle. The Spirit of *promise* descended on the *apostles* of Jesus, and enabled them to speak foreign languages, to the instruction and edification of those who heard them. So may every child of God feel *now*, that if he be "steadfast, immoveable, alway abounding in the work of the Lord," to the very *last point of strength and time*, the Lord will not only

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honour him in his departure hence, but send down a spiritual blessing on his labours after he is gone, so that, “he being dead, yet speaketh.”

No. III.

ELISHA HEALING THE WATER, AND THE MEANS HE USED.

2 KINGS II. 19—21.

“And the men of the city said unto Elisha, Behold, I pray thee, the situation of this city is pleasant, as my lord seeth : but the water is naught, and the ground barren. And he said, Bring me a new cruse, and put salt therein. And they brought it to him. And he went forth unto the spring of the waters, and cast the salt in there, and said, Thus saith the Lord, I have healed these waters ; there shall not be from thence any more death or barren land.”

“Αρκεῖ σοι ἡ χάρις μου.”

WHAT a true picture is here delineated of things on earth ! What a living sample

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of its present state ! Look where you will, go where you please, there is something pleasant and something unpleasant. Here the ground is luxuriantly fruitful, and delicious products yield a supply to man's wants at little cost. So far all is *pleasant*. But *here also* is something *unpleasant*; the air is infectious, and the climate unhealthy and enervating, and the pallid face and rapid and early death testify to its insalubrity. The enjoyment is "*naught*." *There*, again, the soil is thin and hard-bearing, and patience and costly labour alone can obtain a meet *return*; but *there*, also, the buoyant spirit, the rugged but healthy countenance, the athletic and muscular frame, and the vigorous appetite, attest the bracing atmosphere and the salubrious climate. There is something *pleasant* to counterbalance what is *unpleasant*. May we not hereby learn how sin has defaced this fair creation, so that nowhere can perfection be seen or a place found with-

out its exceptional *but?* May we not also learn a lesson of contentment? In the most unlikely spots of this world of variety there are men able and willing to share its lot. What though the water be "naught," and "the ground barren," yet may the inhabitant say, "The situation is pleasant." What though the prospect be naught, and the *situation* flat and monotonous, yet may the occupier plead, "The water" is sweet, and "the *ground*" *fruitful.*

The city in question, whose "*situation*," said the prophets to Elisha, "is pleasant, as my lord seeth, but the water thereof is *naught*, and the *ground barren*" (ver. 19), was Jericho, as the previous verse informs us;—Jericho, where Elisha was "now tarrying," and a school of the prophets was established. Jericho is too famous a city to be passed over in silence. The mind will travel backward to the time of Joshua, when this strongly fortified town,

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the capital of a kingdom, was miraculously delivered into the hands of God's people. There rises in view the singular march of the priests and army in battle array, day by day around the walls, for the space of six days, amid the fearful wonder of the inhabitants, "whose hearts had melted, neither did there remain any more courage in any man." The suspense is terrible, each one anticipating destruction, they *know not* how. The seventh day arrives, and in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, without any visible cause, the sturdy walls are *flat* on the ground, and a general breach is opened, so that "the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city." (Josh. vi. 20.) Thus fell Jericho, and God's curse remained upon the place, for Joshua was inspired to utter a heavy judgment on whomsoever should attempt to rebuild it. "And Joshua adjured them at that time, saying, Cursed be the man before the

Lord, that riseth up and buildeth this city Jericho: he shall lay the foundation thereof in his firstborn, and in his youngest son shall he set up the gates of it." (Josh. vi. 26.) Time, however, passed on, new generations sprang up, and the *fear*, if not the knowledge of the curse, by *neglect of the written Word*, passed away; and in the reign of that king, unto whom "none was like for wickedness," Ahab, for he "did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel before him," (1 Kings xvi. 33);—*then*, verifying the saying, "As is the master so is the man; as is the prince so will be the people," an individual was found hardy enough to rebuild the city of Jericho. But good is the word of the Lord. Hiel the Beth-elite did build Jericho, but the curse came upon *him* and *his* to the very letter, for "he laid the foundation thereof in Abiram his firstborn, and set up the gates thereof in his youngest son Segub,

according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by Joshua." (Ver. 34.)

Truly, "*Except the Lord build the house*, their labour is but lost that build it." (Ps. cxxvii. 1.) "*We will return and build the desolate places*," is the mind of Hiel and his associates; but "*thus saith the Lord of hosts, They shall build, but I will throw down* ; and they shall call them, *The border of wickedness*, and, *The people against whom the Lord hath indignation for ever*." (Mal. i. 4.) In Elisha's day the city indeed stood, and was, in a sense, restored ; yet the curse rested upon it,— "*the water was naught, and the ground barren*." God's curse had been *recorded*, His fearful threat had been *dared* and *incurred* by the disobedient, and thus the Divine Word was honoured and man confounded.

And now, therefore, the Lord will bring *good* out of *evil*. He will make this city a resting-place for his prophets.

It shall be as an Oxford or a Cambridge to Israel; and the town, built by the hands of wicked and rebellious men, shall become "an habitation for the just," a centre of light from which the truth will radiate over the land, and the proverb be sustained, "The wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just." (Prov. xiii. 22.) Truly, Jericho is not the least interesting of Bible cities, and I might (did the subject admit) follow its history to the New Testament, where we have Jericho still in existence, and marked out as the scene of our Lord's miracle in giving sight to blind Bartimæus. (Mark x. 46.) I will not, however, omit a visit to the spot by a recent traveller. "We took a walk," he says, "to the fountain, whose waters are scattered over the plain. It is the only one near Jericho. There is every reason to regard it as the *scene of Elisha's miracle*. It is a large and beautiful fountain of sweet and pleasant water. It seems to have been once sur-

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rounded by a sort of reservoir, or semi-circular enclosure of hewn stones, from which the water was carried off in various directions to the plain below, but this is now mostly broken away and gone. The fountain pours forth a noble stream, which is scattered in rivulets over the plain, causing fertility and verdure as far as the eye can reach.”*

Such, then, are the historical remembrances associated with the place where Elisha now exercised the power of God in behalf of his College of Prophets, and I would now, with the Holy Spirit’s aid, fix your attention on two points in this miracle—

I. In what part of the waters did Elisha exert his power?

II. The means he used.

I. In what part? It *was the spring*. “And he went forth unto the spring of the waters, and cast the salt in there.” (Ver. 21.) This conveys a deep

* “Scripture Topography,” p. 213.

spiritual truth,—very evident when reflected upon, but very much overlooked. We can easily perceive that, had Elisha's attention been directed to the water only a few yards from the fountain-head, his labour would have been for nought. As fast as he sweetened the *running water*, the *bitter* fountain would still pour out its venom. But we do not so *readily see* and allow that, except the corruption of human nature be attacked at the *fountain-head, the heart*, all other remedial *measures* can only work a passing effect, since the bitter stream of innate depravity will still *run out*. Hence the prominence given in Scripture to the *state of the heart*. “Keep thine heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.” (Prov. iv. 23.) “Out of the heart,” saith our Lord, “proceed evil thoughts, murders,” &c. (Matt. xv. 19.) “A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure

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of his heart bringeth forth evil things." (Matt. xii. 35.) "Sanctify the Lord God *in your hearts*," is the advice of the Apostle Peter. (1 Pet. iii. 15.) And James shows how unreasonable it is to expect any permanent amendment short of this radical cure. "Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?" (James iii. 11.) "No fountain," he adds (ver. 12), "can yield both salt water and fresh." And hence the fervent supplication of the psalmist, "Create in me a clean heart, O God." (Ps. li. 10.) Nothing short of this can avail. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." (Jer. xvii. 9.)

This is the express record of the Holy Spirit concerning the heart of man; not the heart of any particular portion of the world, or of the society thereof, but the heart of *all men*. Such an heart must therefore, as the Psalmist prays, be *created anew*. Do you think your heart has

been created anew? A converted man will not only *think* it, but *feel* it; just as when the blind man, whose eyes Jesus had opened, urged, in reply to every plea for shaking his confidence, "One thing I know, that, whereas I was *blind*, now I *see*." (John ix. 25.) What, then, is your evidence of a *new* heart? Are you bringing forth the fruits of *regeneration*? "Is your rejoicing this, the testimony of your conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, you have your conversation in the world?" (2 Cor. i. 12.) *Then*, you who are showing your new heart by your new life, I would not for one moment deprive of so joyful a hope, so just a confidence. I would not quench its ardour or its vitality one atom; rather, I would urge, cultivate such a hope; pray for *increase* of faith to sustain and strengthen it; earnestly *plead*, ardently long, for a larger *measure* of comfortable assurance that in deed and

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in truth you have been “born again of the Spirit of God ;” that your baptism was a real baptism of the Spirit, wherein you were made, not merely by the outward and visible sign of *water*, but by the *seal of the Holy Ghost*, “a member of Christ, a child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven.” (Church Catechism.) But should any here be thinking they have a new heart as a matter of *course*, because they were made Christians in baptism, and have been pronounced, on a *formal* but explicit *confession* of sin and *profession* of faith in their behalf, *regenerate*, and moreover have, or *ought* to have, *confirmed* that confession and profession before God, the Church, and the world, then it becomes my part, my bounden duty, to arrest such an assumption, and to impress upon your mind that you are taking for *granted* the very thing which has yet to be *proved*; for if the stream of innate corruption had been healed at the *fountain*,—if the heart

had been regenerated and made alive by the Spirit of God,—then am I sure, then am I confident, that you yourself would be altogether *opposed* to countenancing such an assumption. You would never for an instant rest your hope of such a change having passed over you on the outward *administration of a Sacrament* without the *inward* sensibility of “a death unto sin, and a new birth unto righteousness” (Church Catechism), which is the scriptural result of its saving *reception*. It is beside the teaching of the Holy Spirit for any to maintain and cherish so fatal a delusion; for “in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature” (Gal. vi. 15) that doth avail. “And whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his *seed* (the *incorruptible seed of the Word*) remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.” (1 John iii. 9, and 1 Pet. i. 23.)

Now, let me not be mistaken in what I

'am advancing,—let it not be asserted that I am lowering Church principles or depreciating sacramental grace. I am doing no such thing; I am exalting, and will always exalt, true Church of England *principles*; I am uplifting, and will always uplift, true sacramental grace. I would in nowise take from under our feet the position we all occupy and the responsibility we all incur as professing members of so pure a Church; but I would fain exalt in all our minds—I would bring home to all our consciences—the spiritual meaning of the form of sound *words* we congregationally use; and I maintain with our Church in her Twenty-fifth Article, "Of the Sacraments," "that in such *only* as worthily receive the same they have a wholesome effect or operation." May not that which is a practical fact in the Roman and Greek Churches be virtually the same with many of our own people, and the spiritual meaning of the words used be as little understood as

if they were uttered in the Latin or Sclavonic language. It is to this *fact* of spiritual ignorance that even educated men in the world's eye, will trust to forms and ceremonies, and will go through on stated occasions formal closet devotions, without once examining of their own hearts, *Wherein am I the better for it?* and they will thus deceive themselves with the notion that their state is good and their life correct, while the fountain of an unsanctified heart is daily pouring out its bitter waters.

Beloved brethren, mark the conduct of Elisha—see to what part he went to cure the flowing stream that was “naught.” He went *to the spring*. Nothing less can heal the heart and save the *soul* of man. That heart must be created anew, and must show its *new* creation by its new action—must evidence its spiritual existence by its spiritual operation, or you cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven; it must be “Christ in you the hope of

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glory." (Col. i. 27.) "In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." (John vii. 37.)

II. The means Elisha used next invite our attention. "And he said, Bring me a new cruse, and put salt therein. And they brought it to him. And he went forth unto the spring of the waters, and cast the salt in there, and said, Thus saith the Lord, I have healed these waters; there shall not be from thence any more death or barren land." (Vers. 20, 21.) Salt is a conspicuous article in Scripture. It was a pledge of *fidelity*, and is so still in the East. If you once eat salt with an Arab, his life is pledged for your life. Some few grains of salt and bread pass the lips, and then the words are used—"By this salt and bread I will not betray thee;" and in the Book of Chronicles

we read—"The Lord God of Israel gave the kingdom over Israel to David by a *covenant of salt.*" (2 Chron. xiii. 5.) Salt was also a sign of maintenance. Thus, in the Book of Ezra, the adversaries of Judah, in stating their case to Artaxerxes the king, say, "Now because we have maintenance from the king's palace" (Ezra iv. 14), which is literally, as rendered in the margin, "because we are *salted with the salt of the palace*"—*i.e.*, supported at the king's charge. When a native of the East means to say he is fed by any one, he uses the expression, "I eat such an *one's salt*." Salt was also a constant accompaniment of the *ceremonial law*. "Every sacrifice shall be *salted with salt*," are the words of Jesus; and we find from Lev. ii. 13 that salt was a component part of every sacrificial ordinance—"With all thine *offerings thou shalt offer salt*;" and it is in this sense that we find our Lord and his apostles using salt figuratively for *grace*,

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saying, “If the salt have lost its saltness, wherewith will ye season it?” (Mark ix. 49, 50)—if the grace which should be “purifying your hearts by faith” be itself abused and corrupted, wherewith will ye season or correct it? What else is more pungent or corrective? See then, saith the Lord, that “ye have salt in yourselves;” see that my doctrine, which drops as the rain, and my speech, which distils as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass (Deut. xxxii. 2)—see that it abide with you in its *truth*, in its fertilizing power, purifying and sanctifying all your evil and corrupt affections even as salt by its seasoning properties can amend and check the decay and waste of animal substances; and his apostle in a like sense exhorting to a pure and profitable use of the tongue, by assimilating its effects upon those around us to the valuable qualities of this wholesome mineral—“Let your conversation

be alway with grace, *seasoned with salt*, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man" (Col. iv. 6); or, as it is elsewhere expressed, "that it may minister grace unto the hearers." (Eph. iv. 29.) Thus the means used by Elisha to heal the waters point to another deep spiritual truth—(2) they remind every one of this inquiry, Have ye *salt in yourselves*? Is grace working in your heart, "mortifying your evil and corrupt affections, and inclining you daily to exercise all virtue and godliness of living?" Is it to be plainly seen that the conversation flowing out of your heart, as water from the spring, is no longer "naught"—*i.e.*, as that expressive word means "not anything" (ne aught), not worth anything, wicked and corrupt—but is it, on the contrary, useful, wholesome, edifying, *seasoning*, and *seasonable*? The proverb tells us that "a naughty person, a wicked man, walketh with a froward mouth" (Prov.

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vi. 12); and even when his mouth is silent, it is added, “he winketh with his eyes, he speaketh with his feet, he teacheth with his fingers.” The corrupt fountain can only emit a bitter stream.

3. But there is another feature in the *means here used* which may convey a useful hint—they were *contrary to nature*, contrary to any means that man would have employed to produce a like effect. Salt, we know, renders water bitter and nauseous instead of sweet and pleasant to drink, and naturally, therefore, the salt would have served but to increase the brackishness of the fountain. The fact, then, of Elisha using a remedy opposed to the effect wanted, not only went to make the miracle more evident, more palpable and indisputable, but it also confirmed a stumbling truth—viz., that grace and nature are contrary the one to the other,—that the ways of God (so far as seen in this fallen world) and the ways of man in curing an evil are altogether

different; both will use means, but the *means* which it pleases Jehovah to use are not those which man would choose or even *think of*. “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord.” (Isa. lv. 8.) When Jesus would open the eyes of the blind man, “He spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and He anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay” (John ix. 6), or, as it is in the margin, “spread the clay upon the eyes of the blind man.” Man would never have done this of his own mind, for he would consider the means were calculated to make a seeing man *blind* rather than a *blind man* to see. And yet they *answered the end*. Surely these *opposites*—these *unlikely means fetching a good end*—are meant to teach us something. What can it be? What may be suggested more useful if not more probable than this? They were intended to humble man, and to bring him into submission to the

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righteousness of God. "God chooses foolish things of the world," or things foolish in the world's sight, to "confound the wise." (1 Cor. i. 27.) Preaching the Word, that great instrument of conversion, wherewith, under the ministration of the Spirit, the missionary is enabled to turn the wild and demoralized savage into a mild and moral Christian,—this all-effectual mean is called "*foolishness*" in the Bible. "It pleases God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe" (1 Cor. i. 21), the meaning of which is clear from a preceding sentence (ver. 18), "The preaching of the cross is *to them that perish foolishness*," *i.e.*, the means used are, in their eyes, not only unlikely or incapable, but *foolish* and *contemptible*.

Apply this view, then, beloved, to ourselves individually. What is your opinion of the means the Lord is now using through the world to heal the bitter fountain of man's heart, which is in itself

"naught," or good for nothing? Do you think they are *likely* means, *profitable* means? Do you respect them as wise and salutary, and eminently calculated to gain the end? Or are they, in your estimation, of little account? Are prayer, reading the Bible, a sanctified *Lord's-day*, happily passed in public worship, in Sunday teachings, and other works of charity, little esteemed or little understood by you? Then think whether your *means* and God's means are not contrary the one to the other. Then ask of your own best sense and spirit, Can the all-wise God have ordained *means* that are inefficient to the end? Is not such a thought the most unlikely and improbable of all things? What am I doing, then, in slighting, misusing, or abusing these means of grace? Shall I not certainly lose the end, if so I err by the way? Such a view, brethren, may, with God's blessing, lead *some* to think more highly of God's *means*, and less of their own; and

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so, as the salt cured the brackish water, and the clay opened the eyes of the blind, may “the foolishness of God” be seen to be “wiser than men; and the weakness of God stronger than men.” (1 Cor. i. 25.)

No. IV.

ELISHA WITH THE KINGS.

2 KINGS III. 14.

“And Elisha said, As the Lord of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, surely, were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat the King of Judah, I would not look toward thee, nor see thee.”

“Αρκεῖ σοι ἡ χάρις μου.”

THE life of Elisha was eminently useful; he was always a practical man going about doing good. Whether in relieving the pressing need of a deceased prophet's widow, and in saving her “two sons” from being “bondmen” to the creditor (2 Kings iv. 1); or in lifting up a lost “ax head” from the bottom of a stream

for an anxious and honest workman, seeing that “it was borrowed” (2 Kings vi. 5); or in ministering to the happiness of the noble Shunammite (iv. 14 to end); or in healing the pestilential disease of the mighty Naaman (v. 14); or, as here, coming to the aid of three *potent* kings; —wherever the *occasion*, or whatever the *circumstances*, usefulness was his aim, and the glory of God his end. The scene of his life recorded in the chapter of the text brings up to view no less than four kings, and their several doings in connexion with the history of the prophet; and I do not see a clearer way of noticing the whole event than by taking them in succession, and dwelling on their state of mind as evidenced by their conduct.

I. The first personage mentioned in the chapter is Jehoram, son of the wicked Ahab, having succeeded his brother Ahasziah, who fell down through a lattice in his upper chamber, and was killed. (2 Kings i. 2, 17.) Jehoram, we read,

reigned twelve years, and his character is somewhat of an improvement upon his father; for “he wrought evil in the sight of the Lord; but not like his father, and like his mother,” the desperate Jezebel. (Ver. 2.) Mesha, King of Moab, had long rendered a heavy tribute to the King of Israel of “an hundred thousand lambs, and an hundred thousand rams, with the wool,” for he “was a sheep-master.” (2 Kings iii. iv.) But in the latter part of Ahab’s reign, taking advantage of his continual wars with the Syrian King, Benhadad, whereby his kingdom was much weakened, he *rebelled*, and withheld the tribute. This act on his part is prophetically described by Isaiah (xvi. 1), “Send ye the lamb to the ruler of the land from Sela to the wilderness, unto the mount of the daughter of Zion,” &c.

The present expedition was undertaken by Jehoram to recover his father’s rights, and obtain payment of the tribute; and

for this end he strengthens himself by a treaty with Jehoshaphat, the excellent King of Judah, and his relative ; for Jehoshaphat's son was married to Athaliah, daughter of Jezebel, and Jehoram's sister (2 Kings viii. 16—18), and she was a woman, unhappily, the very counterpart of her mother, and brought much evil on Judah, as Jezebel had done on Israel. Jehoshaphat complies with this request, and thus a second time incurs the just rebuke of a prophet, “Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord ?” (2 Chron. xix. 2.) But what could Jehoshaphat do ? How could he well escape the requisition to help a relative, who was at least nominally a servant of God, against a heathen and a stranger ? And are we not here warned of the consequences which follow the relationships we form ? These cannot be *inconsequential*, their influence must *bear upon us* for *good or evil*. And is there no modern instance, at this time, of kings

holding back from carrying out their country's wish and their country's good by reason of a relative connexion drawing them by natural ties in another direction? The two Kings are further assisted against Moab by the King of Edom, probably of necessity obliged to aid Judah at this time, and the expedition advances through his territories. A want very frequent in that arid land, and very distressing if un supplied, soon beset the army: "there was no water for the host, and for the cattle that followed them." (Ver. 9.) And now the true character of Jehoram is developed, and he is seen to be a godless man, having the fear of the creature, but no fear of the Creator, before his eyes. He shows the bent of his mind and the enmity of his heart, by imputing to the Lord the evil that beset them, and blasphemously charges Him with the result: "Alas! that the Lord hath called these three Kings together, to deliver them into the hand of Moab!"

(Ver. 10.) Thus “the foolishness of man perverteth his way, and his heart fretteth against the Lord.” (Prov. xix. 3.) How alarming is the state of that man’s mind, who moodily views the cross events of life as the orderings of a Providence working against him, and thus punishing the enmity and disobedience of which he is conscious! But it is not merely an *alarming*, it is a most *pitiable state*. That mind is so thoroughly at fault, so utterly unworthy as well as unwise in its judgment, so set against “the goodness and longsuffering which would fain lead to repentance” (Rom. ii. 4), that one cannot but yearn for its being aroused and convicted of its base ingratitude.

Let any now possessed of such a mind allow a reasonable thought on its fearful condition. While held in being, and surrounded with many temporal blessings, wherein can they justly charge evil against the Author of all good? But much more, as *professing Christians*, who avow their

faith in God's own Son as having died for their sins, and as having thus procured a redemption from the otherwise certain punishment of hell, how can they doubt for an instant, either reasonably or gratefully, the love of Him who has so *proved* that He *loves them*?

Take heed, then, to this condemning feature in Jehoram's character,—his placing his present hard and perilous circumstances to *the account of God*; and let us next mark how the Lord was better to him than he deserved. This will introduce us to the second character in the chapter.

II. *Jehoshaphat*.—Of him we read, “There are good things found in thee, in that thou hast taken away the groves out of the land, and hast prepared thine heart to seek God.” (2 Chron. xix. 3.) These “good things” were the salvation of himself and his fellow-warriors; for his presence alone determined Elisha to interfere.

Jehoshaphat's alliance with the family of Ahab brought great temptation to himself and his children, and, as the history of Judah teaches, much trouble on his country, through the wickedness of Athaliah, and in this respect his life is a useful warning on that important step, a *family alliance*. But the Lord was merciful to him, and through his grace he kept the faith, and was ever anxious to hear, to understand, and to do his will. So, here, instead of falling in with the foolish and evil suggestion of his relative, he at once adopts a prudent as well as righteous course in this extremity. "Is there not here a prophet of the Lord, that we may inquire of the Lord by Him?" is his pertinent question. (Ver. 11.) How striking the *contrast!* the one *fretting against God*, the other *anxious to speak to God*; the one charging the Most High with *evil*, the other, while conscious of his permitting it, yet assured that the present evil would

prove an *eventual good*, and therefore he is only desirous to walk through it as God would have him.

Which of these two states of mind recommends itself to your *mind*? When trouble is nigh, and you are in a position of difficulty from which there seems no escape—when man cannot aid, and, like Jehoram, you are at your wits' end—what course would you *wish* to take? or, rather, which course *would you take*? Do you think you would turn upon God, and charge Him with the evil? or, if not directly doing so, yet, by entirely dwelling upon the secondary causes, and imputing the evil to these, *virtually* cast it upon *Him* who orders all these *secondary causes*? Or, do you think, happily and rightfully, that you could, with Jehoshaphat, see God's hand intelligently in it, and, instead of falling out with, or running away from Him, *fly* to Him as your refuge? Who so able to deliver from the evil as

He who, for wise ends, permits the evil ? Who can so efficiently change second causes, and bring water out of the stony rock, as He who has all second causes in his range and power ?

Reflect *earnestly* and *patiently* on these two *states* of mind, and you will find they *determine the character*; you will find they evidence the man to be *of God*, or *not of God*. It was so in *Jehoram* and *Jehoshaphat*; for this was not a single instance in which they exhibited these states of mind. *Jehoshaphat*, in *Ahab's* day, and when helping him, had shown the same respect and desire to know God's will at the hand of *Micaiah* (1 Kings xxii. 7) as he did here at the hand of *Elisha*: and *Jehoram*, you will see, a few years after, again sinfully charged God with the *evil of his circumstances*, and hastily determined to take off *Elisha's* head, in the extremity to which the siege of *Samaria* had reduced himself and

people: “Behold, this evil is of the Lord; what should I wait for the Lord any longer?” (2 Kings vi. 33.)

Thus the *state of mind* under a *providential trial* becomes an *index* of the individual’s character and position before God; and again I urge, therefore, “Reflect upon your present state of mind. Examine it carefully on this point, and thereby good may come to thee.” The inquiry of Jehoshaphat brings forward the *third* character in the chapter.

III. *Elisha*.—In reply to the King’s earnest demand, an attendant answered, “Here is Elisha, the son of Shaphat, which poured water on the hands of Elijah,” *i. e.*, “was his *servant*;” but whether meant to depreciate his position, and prevent his interference, in the spirit of “Is not this the carpenter’s son?” (Matt. xiii. 55), or to raise him in the *estimation* of the company as the confidant of so great a man, may be left to *individual* opinion. Be this

as it may, Jehoshaphat appears as one well acquainted with the prophets of God, for he instantly rejoined, “*The Word of the Lord is with him*” (Ver. 12)—I know him to be a man of God—we are sure of the truth from his lips. “So the King of Israel, and Jehoshaphat, and the King of Edom went down to him ;” and now the spiritual discernment of Elisha is seen. He addresses Jehoram as if he had himself been a witness of his daring and foolish charge against Jehovah. “And Elisha said unto the King of Israel, What have I to do with thee ? get thee to the prophets of thy father, and to the prophets of thy mother.” (Ver. 13.) It was a bold speech. How firm the prophet stands, in conscious truth and rectitude ! “Behold, thou shalt stand before kings !” Life and liberty are nothing to him where duty prompts. Like another Luther, at the Diet of Worms, in the presence of the Emperor, Elector, and mighty princes, he stands calm and collected, inwardly

praying, with the Word of God in his heart, “*Here I take my stand; God help me!*” and so the naked truth, without compliment or compromise, comes from him. And the time clearly required such determination; for the King, nothing ashamed of his presumptuous speech against Jehovah, repeats it in the presence of his prophet; and then Elisha proceeds to give honour where honour was due, in the words of the text, “As the Lord of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, surely, were it not that I regard the *presence of Jehoshaphat*, the King of Judah, I would *not look toward thee, nor see thee.*” (Ver. 14.)

Out of regard, then, for the God-fearing Jehoshaphat, he sets himself to seek the Lord and to know his mind. A minstrel is called, and, as he plays before the prophet, “the hand of the Lord came upon him” (ver. 15), and he at once issues his orders, “Thus saith the Lord, Make this valley full of ditches.”

(Ver. 16.) What a strange direction ! Of what possible use to a thirsty and fainting army could dry ditches be ? But the order is accompanied by a *word of promise*. And this is ever the case. No precept is ever enjoined without its accompanying promise. “For thus saith the Lord, Ye shall not see wind, neither shall ye see rain ; *yet that valley* shall be filled with water, that ye may drink, both ye, and your cattle, and your beasts.” (Ver. 17.) “*Yet that valley* shall be filled with *water* !” And further it is added, “This is but a light thing in the sight of the Lord : he will deliver the Moabites also into your hand.” (Ver. 18.) Now, then, will they be obedient ? Will they “love” the precept that they may obtain the “promise ?” Will they set to work, wearied and fainting as they are, and dig the parched ground into ditches ? *They will. It is done* ; and the promise is realized. “It came to pass in the morning, when the meat offering was

offered, that, behold, there came water by the way of Edom, and the country was filled with water." (Ver. 20.) *Good and sure is the word of the Lord.* There is no change, vacillation, or injustice with Him. Observe also the *time*. "When the meat offering was offered ;" when the morning sacrifice was in hand, and all were praying towards Jerusalem, as directed in Solomon's dedication of the temple—"If thy people go out to battle against their enemy, whithersoever thou shalt send them, and shall pray unto the Lord toward the *city* which thou hast chosen, and toward the house that I have built for thy name : then HEAR thou in heaven their prayer and their supplication, and maintain their cause." (1 Kings viii. 44, 45.) Then, while engaged in this acceptable service, the blessing comes ; and see where strength lies in the time of extremity and tribulation. In the *sanctuary*. "The Lord will send help from the sanctuary." So David, in the day of

his distress, “went into the house of the Lord, and worshipped.” (2 Sam. xii. 20.) See also the necessity of using *means* in the day of *adversity*. The ditches must *be dug out*, commands must be obeyed, and then God will provide *the water*—He will send his *supporting* aid. This is always *the rule*. “Fill the water pots with water” (John ii. 7) was the order given before our Lord changed the water into wine. They might have pleaded, what is the use?—we want *wine*, and not *water*. But they obeyed; they did it, and the wine came. It is ours, then, beloved, to *dig the ditches*, to prepare room, and then the Lord will surely do his part, and send the water. It is ours to be diligent in the *use of means*, and then God will never withhold his blessing upon the means which He has himself enjoined. It is ours to wait upon Him in his Word and sanctuary, and the aid of the Holy Spirit shall come, and He “will breathe upon the dry bones,

that they may live." This is what we all need—a *single obedience* to "what is written." Have you such a faith? Are you exercising such an obedience? The life of your individual soul as much depends upon this as the life of the allied army did in Elisha's day. Look to it; see to it, that ye neglect not the *means* of salvation. *Prayer* in the closet, in the family, in the congregation—the reading and hearing of the Word, and the habitual use of the Lord's Supper,—these are the means, by faithful use of which the *soul thrives*. The water came. And this leads to the remaining characters in the chapter.

IV. The Kings of Moab and of Edom.

And first, of *Moab*. He had gathered together a large army also. "And when all the Moabites heard that the kings were come up to fight against them, they gathered all that were able to put on armour, and upward, and stood in the border." (Ver. 21.) When the day-

light appears, they are struck with an extraordinary sight. “The sun shone upon the water, and the Moabites saw the water on the other side as red as blood.” (Ver. 22.) They had no grounds for supposing there could be any water in that direction; and, moreover, what they did see appeared to them “as red as blood;” and hence they hastily reached the very natural conclusion that it was blood caused by a dispute and contention among the united forces. “And they said, This is blood: the kings are *surely slain*, and they have smitten *one another*: now therefore, Moab, to the spoil.” (Ver. 23.) I have said it was a hasty conclusion, and it issued in as hasty a *destruction*; for, rushing impetuously and irregularly on a compact army, instead of, as they had anticipated, a disordered and broken-up host, they were firmly encountered by the refreshed and well-appointed army, and an entire defeat and slaughter of a multitude was the result.

And thus the sudden joy and boisterous expectations of the wicked are often but the prelude to their as sudden discomfiture and death.

The *conduct* of the King of Moab, interweaved as it is with a brief reference to the King of Edom, alone remains to be noticed. Overwhelmed with the overthrow of his army and the coming destruction of his country—for the word of God, “Ye shall smite *every fenced city*, and every *choice city*, and shall fell every good tree, and stop all wells of water, and mar every good piece of land with stones” (ver. 19), was *exactly* fulfilled—he first attempted an escape by the connivance of the King of Edom; at least so it appears to me from the twenty-sixth verse.

I think the readiness with which the *Moabites* drew the hasty inference that the allied kings were fighting with each other arose from an expectation on their part that the King of Edom, whose

heart was ever against the Jews, would play false, and try and promote a difference—and the thought is fostered by the course adopted by the Moabites in attempting to escape—for why should they hope to compass an exit through Edom's forces which they could not find through Jehoram's or Jehoshaphat's army, unless in the expectation that Edom would be favourable, and allow them an easy egress? The attempt, however, failed, because Edom saw the case was too decided and the victory too complete to allow of vacillation, and both wisdom and security demanded that he should keep true. Foiled in this effort, the unhappy king betook himself to a neighbouring stronghold, and there exhibited the awfully dark state of a mind full of superstitious fear, and without God in the world. "Then he took his eldest son that should have reigned in his stead, and offered him for a burnt offering upon the wall." (Ver. 27.) How exactly this

illustrates the truth of Paul's description of unconverted man, "without *natural affection*, implacable, unmerciful." (Rom. i. 31.) When worked upon by fear and selfish interest, the *natural affection* of a parent yields to a supposed necessity, and, as the prophet implies, "he gives his *first-born* for his *transgression*, and the *fruit* of his body for the sin of his soul" (Micah vi. 7); for man will give anything but *his heart* to the Lord. And let none esteem this as a *solitary* or *extreme case*. *Extreme*, indeed, it may be, but it is not a *solitary instance*. We, with the light of God's revelation in our hands, may well shudder at the description, and deem it impossible for a being gifted with reason so to act. But remember Hazael's *protestations* and Hazael's doings. "Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?" (2 Kings viii. 13.) Nevertheless the dog did it. And no one unconvinced by the Holy Ghost of his own innate depravity

and alienation from righteousness—no one unconvinced of his need of a Saviour's blood as a sacrifice to atone for and wash it away, can have any practical idea of the extremity of carnal wickedness to which man will reach when hedged in by cross circumstances and a necessity seems to demand such a way of escape. Believe God's Word from beginning to end, with a sure trust in His Almighty name, and we may learn *three things* therefrom :—1st, Never to be surprised at any wickedness of man in his unconverted state. 2dly, Never to doubt any degree of holiness he may attain when converted; and 3dly, Never to fear what may be coming on the world and us, so long as a Triune Jehovah is ours, and we are his.

No. V.

THE POWER AND WEAKNESS OF FAITH CONTRASTED IN ELISHA.

2 KINGS IV. 29.

“Then he said to Gehazi, Gird up thy loins, and take my staff in thine hand, and go thy way: if thou meet any man, salute him not; and if any salute thee, answer him not again: and lay my staff upon the face of the child.”

“Ἄρκεῖ σοι ἡ χάρις μου.”

I HAVE remarked that the life of Elisha was eminently practical and useful, and this chapter alone contains ample evidence of the fact. There are no less than *five* instances wherein the prophet exemplifies the man of faith and the man of love witnessing to the faith of God by his

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grateful deeds. There is one feature to be observed in all these mighty as well as merciful actions. They were not done for *selfish ends*—they were not intended to benefit the worker. The glory of God and the happiness of man were the single object. Jesus has laid down this principle as the very first thing to be acted upon in following Him—“If any man will come after me, let him *deny himself.*” (Matt. xvi. 24.) In the scrutinizing eye wherewith the unconverted are wont to examine the conduct of God’s people, there are few things they more quickly *detect* and condemn than *self-seeking*; and they are very right in so doing. It does, beyond question, militate against the faith of any man’s being a right faith who is seen advancing his own selfish interest at the expense of his neighbours and the good of the community.

There needs, however, a caution in this sweeping sentence of condemnation

—viz., that disinterested conduct is ever seen to bring its own reward, and that, as a *rule*, the disinterested and self-denying follower of Christ will be blessed even in this life. This fact is both agreeable to the testimony of God's Word and the experience of man, wherever it is faithfully carried out; and therefore God's people are not to be traduced by a "curse causeless," when it pleases Him to bless their self-denying actions to themselves or families in this world. Provided their motive in acting as they did, or doing what seemed right, was single and sincere, then, I plead, it can be no matter of surprise, but is rather a natural consequence, that the end should be prosperous and happy,—that, in doing good to others, they are found to have benefited themselves; for "he that watereth shall be watered also himself," and "he that diligently seeketh good procureth favour." (Prov. xi. 25 and 27.) Thus a scorner might urge that Elisha

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received a comfortable lodging and refreshment for himself and servant without cost, and that it was reasonable he should reward the Shunammite's family for this favour; but such a one must not be suffered to pass current with half a story —he must be invited to see that it was the faith of the Shunammite which impelled her to stay the prophet on his journey, and to "constrain him to eat bread" (Ver. 8), even as Lydia constrained Paul and his companions to abide in her dwelling. (Acts xvi. 15.)

In reviewing the conduct of Elisha in the several events recorded in the chapter of the text, I would mainly direct attention to his dealings with the lady at Shunem, as therein his faith was most tried and its *soundness* evidenced. May God the Holy Ghost bless the attempt!

We appreciate his love and pity in providing for the wants of the poor widow by multiplying her single pot of oil till she had enough to pay her debt and

rescue her two sons from bondage ; and we rejoice at this pre-manifestation of the apostle's precept, " As we have opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially *unto them who are of the household of faith.*" (Gal. vi. 10.) We venerate his considerate healing of the *death* in the pot, arising from wild and poisonous gourds being used in the extremity of a dearth (2 Kings iv. 38) for the supply of the table, whereby, in a few moments, he turned a deadly poison into a pleasant and wholesome refreshment ; and we can admire his self-denial when, in the midst of this famine, one having brought him a present of twenty barley loaves of the first-fruits (ver. 42), his forethought is at once fixed on the hungry people around him, and he is enabled, in the exercise of this charity, to multiply the loaves to an extent that suffices to feed " one hundred men." These evidences of a right faith not only attract our attention, but win our esteem for the enlarged benevolence

of the man of God ; but in the case of the Shunammite, which occupies the bulk of the chapter, we have these rare virtues combined in an exercise of faith, which at once evidenced its *power* and its *weakness*, its success and its failure. Let us dwell awhile on these *points*.

1st. The *power* of Elisha's faith, and the *success* which attended it. The Shunammite, perceiving Elisha to be an holy man of God, passing continually by their dwelling (ver 9), persuaded her husband to allot him "a little chamber on the wall," where, from the construction peculiar to Eastern dwellings, he could turn in and enjoy that rest and refreshment *needful for a traveller*, without being deprived of the privacy for prayer and meditation *required by a prophet*. Elisha readily falls in with this providential arrangement, and, in gratitude for the kindly provision, seeks an occasion of conferring some benefit on the family. After a little inquiry, he learns that, blessed

with a sufficiency of temporal riches, they were without that gift which, to a Jewish household, was specially humbling and distressing—they had no heir to build up the inheritance. “Verily,” said Gehazi, “she hath no child.” (Ver. 14.) Elisha at once promises her the blessing. That this was esteemed a peculiar favour as well as a peculiar recompence under the Jewish economy is plain, from its bestowal on Sarah, on Rachel, on Hannah, and on Elizabeth. The promise was made good in due time. The Shunammite “bare a son at that season that Elisha had said unto her, according to the time of life.” (Ver. 17.) What rejoicing would attend upon this unlooked-for event! If sorrows often come unexpectedly, so do *joys* also; and the faith which is of God will look on the bright as well as the dark side, and will remember past enjoyments as well as present discomforts. How gladly, then, would the household at Shunem, with

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relatives and friends, unite in the expression of congratulation and mirth. The slaughtered beasts, and the mingled wine, and the well-furnished table, would invite many a guest to the rejoicing banquet. And how would the name of Elisha be magnified in the sight of all! What a reverence would attach to the very step of the man of God! And how would the glory of that God be exalted in the heart of every true Israelite, who "had given such power to man!" There would be but one mind of joy and hope, of thankfulness and praise, and but one aspect of unmixed bliss in which the event would be viewed and celebrated. *It is over*—all again is quiet; the guests have departed—the wonder is losing its interest, time, that hurries persons and events alike forward to their end, has run its annual cycle—not once, but twice and thrice, and, perhaps, twice that thrice, for the child was grown and could accompany his father in the domain. A

joyous period of the year has arrived—it is harvest time. The reapers are in the field, and the lad, with the spirit natural to his age, is happy in the midst of them. The father is regarding him with a gratified and thankful heart. His first-born—his only son—is before his eyes, to whom he is looking for handing down his name and his inheritance among the families of Israel till Messiah come. Who cannot realize his happy face—his satisfied mind—while he watches alike the gambols of his heir and the progress of the reapers? Ah! little does he think of what is about to happen—little does he apprehend the coming stroke.

How merciful is it that we know not what a day—nay, what an hour may bring forth! Suddenly the sun, which exerts such power in Palestine, strikes the child, as it were, to the ground. He cries out as suddenly, “Father, my head, my head.” (Ver. 19.) It is death’s blow, and a few hours passed upon a

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mother's knees, in vain endeavours to repair the stroke, ends the scene. "At noon *he died.*" (Ver. 20.) Who can describe the grief of the bereaved? Some can realize it, but none can portray it; it is beyond the powers of the pen to depicture. For a few moments, perhaps, the parents are lost in gloomy darkness; the desire of their eyes is gone—the hope of their life is vanished. But the faith of *one* comes to their relief. Woman's mind is quick in thought and fertile in expedients. Elisha is the refuge; the man of God is the friend in need; and, placing her departed one in the chamber of the prophet, she makes all speed to reach his dwelling at Mount Carmel. He sees her "approaching afar off" (ver. 25), and from the haste, as well as the unusual time—for it was, as her husband with less hope and less faith had suggested, "neither new moon, nor sabbath" (ver. 23)—he at once conjectures that something is the matter. "Yonder,"

addressing his servant Gehazi, "behold, yonder is that Shunammite: run now, I pray thee, to meet her"—inquire the reason of this unexpected visit—"say unto her, Is it well with thee? is it well with thy husband? is it well with the child?" (Vers. 25, 26.) And now, brethren, let the spirit of faith—let the heart of God's people *mark*, ponder over, and take in the full import of *her calm rejoinder*, "*It is well.*" How? *Well*, when all is *ill*—when the only child, the only son and prop of the house, is gone? *Yes*, "*it is well!*" How much may be conveyed in one brief sentence! What exquisite meaning may *three* short words declare! *It is well*, because the Lord has *done* it. "*Let Him,*" and Him only, "*do what seemeth Him good.*" (1 Sam. iii. 18.) But does she not feel it? Does she not sorrow over it? Is she not greatly distressed? Oh! yes. What follows tells the true tale. Ceremony is banished—the forms of society are lost sight of—

she hurries to the man of God, and falls before him, grasping "his feet" with feeling energy, to the surprise and displeasure of the attendant, who came near "to *thrust her away.*" Elisha will not hear of it; he is too merciful and kind to interpose any barrier in the way of such distress; his keen eye sees at once, before it is expressed, the extremity of her tribulation. "Let her alone; for her soul *is vexed* within her." (Ver. 27.) Such is the simple but affecting narrative connected with the *power* and *success* of Elisha's *faith*. Jehovah honoured that faith in the bestowal of the child. We have now to enter on the less pleasing task of noticing the *weakness* and *failure* of this faith, illustrating the preacher's maxim, "There is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not." (Eccl. vii. 20.)

II. This *weakness* and this failure is to be seen at the very dawn of the trial now coming upon the prophet. "The Lord

hath hid it from me, and hath not told me" (ver. 27), is the querulous expostulation of the now mortified prophet, even before the nature of the vexation had been ascertained. Is there not here a measure of petulant complaint exceedingly beneath one who had been so highly honoured by the Lord? It is as much as if he had said, "The Lord hath *passed me by*, He has put a slight *upon me*, in inflicting this blow by his own direct hand, without making me a party to it." "*Thou takest too much upon thee*, thou son of Shaphat." Something, at least, of this nature appears to be the prevailing feature of Elisha's mind. He is evidently greatly put out, not so much by the untoward event itself, but at the circumstance of his friend being afflicted *without his knowledge*. How difficult it is to be honoured and lifted up, and yet to remain contented and humble! "Lest," says the apostle, "I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of

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the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure." (2 Cor. xii. 7.) How many a follower of a great man upon earth is spoiled instead of improved by even just and moderate rewards of honour and confidence, and his previously gratified Lord has to take him down again! So it was with Elisha. He has a lesson to learn of *dependent humility*—and the Lord is going to teach it him. He follows up the hasty expression of his petulance and mortification by as hasty a proceeding, which, viewed in the most favourable light, is redolent of presumption and self-confidence:—"Then he said to Gehazi, Gird up thy loins, and take *my staff* in thine hand, and go thy way: if thou meet any man, salute him not; and if any salute thee, answer him not again: and *lay my staff upon the face of the child.*" (Ver. 29.) Here is no prayer, no earnest seeking, no humble

inquiry of the Lord, “What must I do?” but, in the spirit of one aiming to work “lying wonders” rather than *healing* benefits, he puts his own staff into the hands of his servant, anticipating that a miracle might be wrought and a child restored to life by the simple touch of the *holy staff*, without his own presence or effort. Did Aaron ever intrust his rod to another? or was it ever productive of a miracle out of his own hands? And had, then, Elisha any warrant for this procedure? *None* whatever. He had, indeed, the fact of Elijah’s raising the widow’s son before his eyes; but he might have remembered how that wondrous deed was accompanied and achieved—by *earnest, wrestling* prayer. Was it that he considered the double portion of his predecessor’s spirit which rested upon him, ought to show itself in such an action as this? Perhaps *such* was his thought. He was to be taught

otherwise. And the lesson begins with a *woman*. Even the Shunammite's discernment, in the midst of her deep distress, seems to have discovered something amiss. She has clearly no faith in Gehazi's mission. Instead of hastening back, as was natural, to see the wonder-working effect of *the staff* upon the face of the child, she holds fast by the prophet, and declares, "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." (Ver. 30.) How very striking and instructive is this conduct on her part. Did not the Lord here mercifully direct her, that she might be the instrument of recalling Elisha to himself, and of bringing him down from his pinnacle of presumptuous folly. Bishop Hall makes this just observation on the act:—"It was done," he says, "of *human conceit*, and not by Divine instinct; and so it failed of the effect."

Let us now, in a few words, examine

ourselves on this event in Elisha's history.

1st. On the *power of faith* and its *success*, as exemplified by the prophet.

What is the working of faith in us? Have we faith? Not all. Some are without faith, because they "have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame" (1 Cor. xv. 34) with *whom it is so*. I speak it to your peril if you will *continue to have it so*, for "without faith it is *impossible* to please God" (Heb. xi. 6); and therefore without faith you cannot be saved; for again it is written, "Whatsoever is not of *faith* is sin." (Rom. xiv. 23.) But what is faith? It is not a mere abstract principle, or a notion of the head; but it is fixed upon an object, and issues in doing; and so it becomes an exercise of the heart. The object is *Jesus Christ*, the Son of God and the Son of man, "who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification" (Rom. iv. 25); and the *doing* is

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the keeping of his commandments, every one of them, with full purpose and energy of soul. This is the faith that saves ; and it reaches man through *grace* —the grace of love ; “not of yourselves : it is the gift of God.” (Eph. ii. 8.) The same *love* that gave Jesus Christ, his only Son, the *object of faith*, gives also the means to *apprehend* and appropriate that *object*. This is the Holy Spirit’s *office*. Do you believe in *Jesus Christ*? Then an anxious, self-denying, holy life will *show* it ; for “with the heart man believeth unto righteousness,” while “with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” (Rom. x. 10.)

Are you without faith in *Jesus Christ*? Have you no practical trust in Him? You show it assuredly in your life. Any close observer of your conversation and conduct for a few years can tell it as plainly as if it were written on yon “wall with the fingers of a man’s hand.” Have faith in God, that ye perish not.

Remember it is yours for the asking. "There is no difference"—*no difference*—but "whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ shall be saved" (Rom. x. 13); and the Spirit, like the wind, visits every quarter of the globe in turn. Do you possess faith? Are you hopefully believing in the Lord Christ? Many of you do so believe. Then let the example of the power of faith in Elisha encourage you to *increase of faith*. Pray as the disciples, "Lord, *increase our faith.*" Believe his own words,—"Verily, I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not *doubt* in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith. Therefore, I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, *believe* that ye receive them, and *ye shall have them.*" (Mark xi. 23, 24.) You cannot possibly know

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until you have tried the measure of power and peace to which a living faith in the Son of God can lift you. Why are you often *inconsistent*, your own hearts being the judges? Why are you sometimes seen tripping or stumbling, disappointing the just and reasonable expectations alike of God and man? Because you are wanting in the *power* of faith—because you have put a confidence in knowledge which you have not *sustained in practice*. All your backsliding, coldness, indifference, and unrighteousness may be traced to this—you are not *living out your profession of faith*.

2dly. Mark the *weakness of faith* and its consequent *failure* in Elisha. This weakness, we have seen, consisted in a *self-confidence* approaching *presumption*. Now, ministers have often complaints from sincere believing souls that they are wanting in *assurance*—that they have not that inward comfort of God's reconciled countenance in Christ which

they desire. There are many explanations to be given—many reasons to be tendered for such a want of assurance, which I cannot speak of at this time. I would at present simply meet such a complaint by the very important question, How would you *bear with assurance*? What effect would a more direct persuasion that all is well for time and eternity with *your soul* have *upon your life*? Would you be as humble and trusting—as dependent and faithful—as you *are now*? Is it not just possible that, like Elisha, you might be lifted up; and, like Paul, lest you go on to higher *elevations*, require a *thorn in the flesh*, to humble you and bring you down to a pilgrim's *mind*? I have little doubt such would be the case with some, were “any abundance of revelations,” any greater manifestations of confidence, vouchsafed. Let any, then, who are wanting in the assurance they wish or deem they ought to possess, think of this

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important question, How would a larger degree of *assurance* bear upon my spiritual state? Ponder over the *weakness* of faith in the prophet. Weigh well its *failure*, and the *palpable* cause. Pray earnestly for increase of faith, hope, and love; and then doubt not, but trustfully credit, that Jehovah will never leave you destitute of his manifold gifts of grace.

No. VI.

THE WISDOM OF ELISHA IN THE HEALING OF NAAMAN.

2 KINGS v. 15.

“And he said, Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel.”

“Αρκεῖ σοι ἡ χάρις μου.”

We have seen, in the previous discourse, the *power* and the *weakness* of Elisha's faith; wherein it *succeeded*, wherein it *failed*. We have noticed his character, as exemplifying lovingkindness and consideration for the wants of others, as ever actively engaged in doing good. In the event recorded in this chapter, we are invited to appreciate his *wisdom*, evidenced

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in his discernment of character, and judgment in dealing therewith. Such a wisdom is to be seen in the result of a proceeding. Oftentimes short-sighted people are surprised at the course taken, at the means adopted ; but when the *result* is obtained, their hasty censure is corrected, and its fallacy exposed. The course taken by Elisha, in the present instance, would have been condemned as *ill-judged*, offensive, and unbecoming by many ; but the end proved its wisdom, and the prophet's discernment of the manner of man with whom he had to deal.

The history of Naaman, so familiar to the Bible-reader, conveys a measure of instruction and interest equal to any record in its sacred pages. Although summed up in one chapter, even a brief notice of every prominent point would fill a volume. My present object is to confine the narrative chiefly to him, the delineation of whose character and life I have in view.

I hope best to attain this by dwelling,
I. Upon the cure of Naaman's body ;
and,

II. Upon that of his soul,
This being the order in which the Holy
Ghost has been pleased to place them.
And may his presence and his aid be
with us !

I. The cure of Naaman's body. The narrative is full of *natural interest* as of *natural simplicity*. The Duke of Wellington of Syria is deservedly “a great man with his master and honourable, because by him the Lord had given deliverance unto Syria” (ver. 1) ; he was also personally a brave man ; but he was afflicted, like our King Alfred, with a disease that baffled the art of the physician—“he *was a leper.*” In the extremity of this visitation—a cause of trouble not only to himself and family, but to the King his master also—he is indebted to the *piety* and *charity* of a captive female, who waited on his wife, for a move on his

part which issued in his ultimate recovery. Her *piety* is seen in that, in the land of idolatry, she remembered, she *forgat* not, Israel's *prophet* and Israel's God ; and her *charity* is exemplified in that, though now a *suffering slave*, she will do good to her enemies to the extent of her power. “Would God ! ” is her faithful entreaty—“Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria ! for he would recover him of his leprosy.” (Ver. 3.) The word is not spoken in vain. It reaches the ear of Naaman, and of Naaman's King ; and he, but too ready to help a valued dependant, sends him at once to Samaria, with a suitable retinue and present. Passing over the pitiable unbelief of the reigning monarch, Jehoram, and his alarm at the arrival of Naaman, as if he had come to seek a fresh occasion of war, we find the mighty warrior is soon on his way to Elisha's dwelling, and, reaching the door, anxiously awaits the approach of the prophet. But

no prophet draws near; the door opens, not for its master's egress, but merely for that of a dependant, who, advancing without ceremony to the chariot and its haughty occupant surrounded by his glittering attendants, delivers the following message: "Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean." (Ver. 10.)

How simple the injunction! how easy the means! how near at hand the healing waters! how thankful and ready to go should Naaman be! Wisdom would say so, policy would say so, and gratitude *ought to say so*. But *no*; pride steps in and mars all. Contempt takes the place of thoughtful consideration, and drives it from the man. Extreme surprise is followed by extreme anger at the supposed indignity; and in a hasty impulse, though all the means of Syria had been exerted in vain to heal him, yet he deems the rivers of *Damascus* better than all the waters of Israel. "Are not Abana and

Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel ? may I not wash in them, and be clean ? So he turned and went away in a rage." (Ver. 12.) This is no uncommon case. Pride mars many a man's prospects for this world : he will not follow a palpable course ; he refuses a remedy for a present evil, by reason of the party who suggested it, or the method recommended. Surprise, followed by contempt and depreciation, takes possession of his mind, and the measure of his perversity is only realized by the extent of the trouble to which he is subjected.

But it is in the *prospect of the next world* that the magnitude of the evil rises up to extremity, and the sad consequences of such a spirit are most forcibly seen. The worship of Cain, of Naaman, and of the Pharisee are alike in this particular. They each exemplify the same principle ; they are disposed to render what they *think is right*, and not what *God has said is right*. If He requires a bleeding sacrifice, they

will offer "the fruit of the ground;" if He says, "Wash, and be clean," "believe, and be saved," they will bring ceremonies and inventions of men, "the standing, and calling, and striking of the hand over the place" (ver. 11); and if He invites to repentance and bitterness of soul for indwelling sin, they will approach with the satisfying plea, "I thank thee that I am not as other men are." (Luke xviii. 11.)

Thus the Word of God is set aside, and the word of man is substituted. And did not Elisha discern something of this spirit in the proud and mighty warrior? Doubtless *he did*. There could be no wish on his part unnecessarily to humble a great man, merely because he was beholden to him for a favour. The whole narrative shows the prophet to be as far from *up-start insolency* as from *abject servility*. He has singly at heart the honour of his God, and the benefit of His creature; and so, with a tact and judgment befitting his office, he puts Naaman on his trial, and

the trial is blessed. Happily for the Syrian, he had honest men around him, who really wished him well, and who were given to see the mistaken feelings of their master. They interfered with becoming and affectionate earnestness, and their forethought on the occasion leads to the pleasing inference that Naaman was a master who rendered unto his servants "that which is just and equal"—one who was far from railing at the mote in their eye, while utterly neglectful of the beam in his own. Their considerate interference presupposes such a state of things in Naaman's household, for kindness begets kindness ; and it shows they *loved* their master, that they sympathized with his distressing state, and were grieved that he should in any wise lose the expected benefit of his long journey by a wrong step ; and so they reverently but affectionately addressed him, " My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it ?

how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?" (Ver. 13.) The appeal was not made in vain; the very quarter from which it came discarded suspicion, and recalled the great man to a better mind. Could they have any bad motive in such disinterested advice? Was it not a clear case of goodwill? Surely it was so. Their self-possession had seen at once, what was now equally perceptible to the returning reason of their master recovering its wonted energy and good sense. Yes, all this may have passed through Naaman's mind far quicker than I have suggested it; and so, without a word of remonstrance or further difficulty, he hearkened to their counsel. "Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean." (Ver. 14.)

How true is the remark of the Preacher, "The words of the wise are as goads,

as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd." (Eccl. xii. 11.) The case was completed; he was again a clean and hale man. And having thus noticed the wisdom of Elisha in healing Naaman's body, I must pass on to the *discernment* manifested in the healing of his soul.

II. It is in this happy *result* that the skill and penetration of the prophet is to be traced, and the whole proceeding justified. "Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life" (Job ii. 4); but how often it ends there, and, provided the body be redeemed from destruction, what matters the soul! It was not so with Naaman. As he was a kind and just master, so he was he a loving and grateful neighbour up to the light that was in him. He was not unmindful of his *benefactor*. He had left him in a *hasty* temper, he returns in a *quiet* mind. He might have gone home at once from Jordan, for he was so far on his way, and

it was his nearest course, as a glance at the map will show; but, although several weary miles of transit through an enemy's country might have been spared himself and retinue in so doing, such a thought appears not to have entered his mind. *Better feelings than selfish worldliness* were already in his heart; so "he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and came, and stood before him: and he said, Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel." (Ver. 15.) In this conduct, the noble warrior shamed many who, with higher knowledge and greater privileges, prove themselves *unthankful*; and are we not reminded of the ingrate lepers who, in our Lord's day, all went their ways, save *one*, so soon as they were healed, and returned not to give thanks to Jesus? (Luke xvii. 11.) Heathen practice often shames Christian *profession*; and, while this is no argument against the truth and power of Christianity, it is a very strong

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and shame-striking plea against all who so cause "the way of God to be evil spoken of," who may expect a far worse judgment than the heathen, and to "be beaten with *many stripes.*" (Luke xii. 47.)

The self-denial of Elisha's character is again apparent here. Like Abraham, he will take nothing of the foreign stranger, lest he should say, "I have made Abram rich" (Gen. xiv. 23); and though Naaman is distressed at his generosity, and urges him, it is to no purpose. (Ver. 16.) But very different is the spirit of his covetous servant. "Behold, my master hath spared Naaman this Syrian, in not receiving at his hands that which he brought: but, as the Lord liveth, I will run after him, and take somewhat of him." (Ver. 20.) The deceptive liar has his due reward, and his love of money proves the root of sore evil to him. This disinterested conduct of the prophet was doubtless a help to Naaman in grasping the new faith, and coming over to the true God.

The personal holiness, honesty, and truthfulness of God's people will be shown in eternity to have done more for the conversion of sinners than the powers of reasoning, the displays of eloquence, or even the exercise of the pulpit, greatly as it pleases God to bless his own ordinance of preaching the Word. He now openly avows his determination to "offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the Lord." (Ver. 17.) And this leads to a very important and interesting part of Elisha's dealings with Naaman, as exhibited in the two requests which followed the refusal of the prophet to receive any remuneration at his hands.

These requests manifest, at the first glance, *superstitious faith* on the one hand, and a *weak faith* on the other; nor will a closer examination probably alter such an opinion.

His first request is this: "And Naaman said, Shall there not then, I pray thee, be given to thy servant two mules' *burden* of

earth?" (Ver. 17.) There is clearly a notion here that the *earth* as well as the water of Israel had a virtue and a sanctity which appertained not to *that of Syria*. And how natural, with the proneness of mankind to run from one *extreme to the other*, that he who had *despised* the water should, now that he had tested its *virtue*, be disposed to *reverence* the *very earth* from which it sprang! And how excusable the desire to take back with him a *memento of the good land* where he had received such a benefit! Indeed, it may be hard to determine whether this association, so prevalent in human nature, and which prompts an individual to carry away something of a place or person he may never see again, or which is endeared to him by living associations, might not have been a predominant feeling in the warrior's mind; and certainly his notions of the proper *material* for his altar were *correct*; for so had the law decreed, "An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me, and shalt

sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings," &c. (Exod. xx. 24.) But a riper knowledge and a clearer faith would have taught that there could be no peculiar sanctity in the *material itself*, if such were Naaman's *impression*, since "the whole earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof." (Ps. xxiv. 1.) And to this we have only to add that, while the request savours of *superstition*, the narrative leaves us in doubt whether Elisha approved or disapproved of the prayer, there being no reply recorded.

2d. The *second* petition of Naaman is of a more questionable sort, and while, as might be expected, it elicited an answer, has raised a contrariety of opinion concerning that answer. The difficulty is this:—How could Elisha sanction in any wise the compromise involved in the request, "In this thing the Lord pardon thy servant, that when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand,

and I *bow myself* in the house of Rimmon: when I bow down myself in the house of Rimmon, the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing"? (Ver. 18.) The answer of Elisha undoubtedly implies such a sanction. "Go," said he, "*in peace.*" As if he had declared, "I cannot *forbid* you. I leave it between your own heart and the Lord." For, although some would view this expression as a mere common salutation, customary in a farewell, yet to my mind it is a clear approval of Naaman's proposal, and specially in the absence of any single word of disapproval. It is quite irreconcileable with Elisha's bold and straightforward character, as well as of Elisha's office, to surmise that he should have left a young beginner in a difficulty of this kind without any definite expression of opinion; and therefore I consider that, for the present time, he sanctioned the proposed course, and he did it in the spirit of our Saviour's principle and our Saviour's maxim, that new con-

verts must be tenderly dealt with, and "new wine must not be put into old bottles," lest the pressure crush the material and the wine be lost. And Namaan, as a general, would have well understood that a young recruit could not be required, with any hope of endurance, to do battle alongside of a tried veteran, or to undergo at once that *severe* ordeal,—that loss of all things, and life itself,—which a refusal to wait upon his master in the house of Rimmon would certainly have involved.

The wise discernment of Elisha in his prudent dealing with Naaman is the lesson here inculcated, and while it is just one of those few narratives of holy writ where we could have wished to have seen the actual result, and to have ascertained how Naaman progressed, and how he "grew in grace, and in the knowledge of the Lord," yet, silent as the Scripture is respecting the future life of the great man, we are not left altogether without a *clue*, which will have our attention in a

succeeding discourse; and, meanwhile, the considerate wisdom of Elisha in the above proceeding reads a word of encouragement to all *beginners in the faith* of Christ.

See how the same spirit animated both Elisha and the Lord Jesus. Wherever our blessed Lord discovered sincerity and honesty, He never “despised the day of small things,” whether it were the suspicions of a Nathanael or the doubts of a Thomas; they were encouraged and *led onward*:—“Thou shalt see *greater things than these*.” (John i. 50.) Such a treatment is positively needful for the young disciple, who, while he believes that “Christ hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God” (1 Pet. iii. 18),—that He did pay out on the cross the full *penalty* of sin, for “the Lord hath laid on him the iniquities of us all” (Isa. liii. 6),—yet at present views these and other collateral truths of the Gospel very much as “one

sees *men* as trees walking," *i.e.*, very indistinctly and imperfectly compared with after knowledge and *experience*. Be not disheartened, then, my younger friends in Christ,—*young* in the *Lord*, *I mean*, whatever may be your *age* in this life. Believe that the same Holy Spirit which has overcome the natural enmity of your heart, and has made you "willing to receive Christ in the day of his power,"—*believe* that the same Spirit will "carry on the good work begun in you," will strengthen you *to hold on* under every trial, and will make you confident of this very thing, "that greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world." (1 John iv. 4.) Only be faithful to your baptismal covenant. Ever bear in mind the reality of that covenant, that you have "a race to run," a battle to fight of which "the world knoweth not." Therefore, "*here is not your rest.*" You cannot reach a certain point and then sit down contented and at

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ease. Such is never the position of the believer. He is alway *pressing onward*, as “not having already attained.” (Phil. iii. 12, &c.) A contrary nature is the ruin of multitudes of souls who, having made some good efforts, stand still and are lost, to the triumph of Satan and the grief of the Spirit.

And let every unconverted soul present take a word of instruction and of warning from Elisha’s dealings with Naaman,—of *instruction*. See, brother or sister, that you must cast aside all notions of being treated and saved in the method desirable or pleasing to yourself. The Gospel comes to you from a Sovereign Jehovah in the way of a plain command. The command is *this*,—“that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ.” (1 John iii. 23.) There is no *option* on your part, nothing left for your decision save the single monosyllable *yes*, or *no*. And, therefore, a word of *warning*. Will you be healed in the way

offered, or not? Salvation is presented to you as in the parable: "I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come." (Matt. xxii. 4.) And not only are you freely invited, but the fitting apparel, the wedding garment, is *yours also*. That wedding garment is the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, "unto all and upon all them that believe." No other remedy can cure the *leprosy* of your soul. See that, like Naaman, you take heed to the Lord's directions, or else, depend upon this, yours may be the lot of the man in the parable who had not on his wedding garment. "And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Vers. 12 and 13.)

No. VII.

ELISHA EXEMPLIFYING THE PRAYER OF FAITH.

2 KINGS VI. 15—17.

“And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, an host compassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master ! how shall we do ? And he answered, Fear not : for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man ; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.”

“Αρκεῖ σοι ἡ χάρις μου.”

WE have hitherto seen Elisha as emi-

nently the *useful man* of his age, whether among his fellow-prophets or in the domestic circle, at the court, or in the camp : one benevolent and useful act was but the precursor of another. We have now to view him in the remainder of his history as more directly exhibiting the peculiar nature of his office—that of a *prophet*—who is given to foresee and foretel things that *shall be*. This feature of his life is illustrated in the chapter of the text by the marvellous manner in which he was enabled to indicate to the reigning monarch the various traps which his adversary the King of Syria had laid for him, and which at length involved Elisha in the difficulty to which the ejaculation of his servant refers : “ Alas, my master ! how shall we do ? ” (Ver. 15.) The historian, after recording a considerate miracle of the prophet, exercised in behalf of a poor workman, in restoring to him a borrowed tool, making the iron which had sunk to the bottom

swim at the top, and teaching incidentally that the heart of man by nature is like the iron axe-head, grovelling *beneath*, until the grace of God lifts it *above* the mire of this world (vers. 1—7), *proceeds*, after this, to inform us that “war had again broken out between Syria and Israel.” (Ver. 8.) Benhadad’s policy at this time was to take his enemy by surprise. The attempt failed, not from any apparent want of foresight or preparation, but from the direct *interference of Elisha*, who gives Jehoram warning of the enemy’s purpose, sending to him, and saying, “Beware that thou pass not such a place, for thither the Syrians are come down.” (Ver. 9.) And thus the strategy of Benhadad was anticipated, and the King of Israel *saved*. And this “not once nor twice” (ver. 10) only; his opponent was foiled many times, and in so strange a manner that he begins to suspect there are traitors in the camp. And “therefore the heart of the King of Syria was

sore troubled for this thing ; and he called his servants, and said unto them, Will ye not shew me which of us is for the King of Israel ?" (Ver. 11.) The suspicion is groundless ; they "are all true men," and no deceivers ; but one, quicker than the rest in scanning a difficulty, points out the reason. " And one of his servants said, *None*, my lord, O king : but Elisha, the prophet that is in Israel, telleth the King of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bed-chamber." (Ver. 12.) The whole attention of the king is now turned upon the prophet, and the natural question before his mind is, how he may get possession of his person, for he feels it is useless to proceed with such a mysterious power as this working against him. He makes inquiry on all sides : " Go and spy where he is, that I may send and fetch him." (Ver. 13.) And at length he is told that Elisha is in Dothan, where, generations before, the brethren of Joseph were tend-

ing their father's flock, and where they perpetrated their treacherous act upon *Joseph*. And now Jehovah, who had enabled Elisha to apprise Jehoram of Benhadad's movements to entrap him, conceals his present approach for wise ends from the prophet himself. He permits him to be taken in the net prepared, and to be fully encompassed by the enemy; the place is surrounded while he and his servant are taking their night's repose, and the morning's dawn discloses a sight of which a vestige had not been seen in the darkening twilight of the preceding day.

How many dangers are impending over the family of man while, wearied with toil of mind or body, they are enjoying their needful rest! How hopeful and comforting to realize the fact, as the eye closes in pressing slumber, that "He who keepeth Israel neither slumbereth nor sleepeth!" (Ps. cxxi. 4.) "When the servant of the man of God was risen

early, and gone forth, behold, an host compassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master ! how shall we do ? " (Ver. 15.) It is now that the enlarged faith of Elisha, reaped from past experience, shines out in clear day. Not in the least alarmed or disconcerted, he calmly replies, "*Fear not :*" and then follows the excellent reason, in the believing assurance, "*They that be with us* are more than they *that be with them.*" (Ver. 16.) Nothing could be more opposed to sense and sight than this ; it was contrary to the actual experience of their own eyes ; for there was "a great host" (ver. 14) hedging them in, while on their side were but the few inhabitants of the place, and they would probably be as ready to deliver them up to the Syrians as the men of Keilah were to surrender *David* to *Saul.* (1 Sam. xxiii. 12.) Still *faith* overcame *sight*, and the assurance is given to the terrified

follower, “ They that be *with us* are more than *they that be with them.*”

What a remarkable statement ! Here, *indeed*, if ever, is faith seen to be “ the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” (Heb. xi. 1.) He is certain that the same Lord who had already so befriended him would not now desert him, but would magnify his own majesty in his deliverance. And then, in accordance with the same mind that actuated him in Naaman’s beginnings, he bends to the inferiority of his servant’s faith, and prays that he might be enabled to see what he himself already believed : “ Lord, I pray thee, *open* his eyes, that he *may see.*” It is the privilege of ministers to pray for the weak of their flock, that their spiritual vision may be enlarged to see even as themselves ; and may we not contrast Elisha’s conduct *here* with that previously *noticed* when he was raising the Shunammite’s son ? There is no attempt at delegation of power here,—

no handing of his own staff to the dependent, that he may go and scatter the enemy. Elisha was an apt scholar in the Divine government, and experience was not lost upon him. The Lord is appealed to at once, and the appeal is not made in vain. "The Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he *saw*." (Ver. 17.) And *what* met his eye? What opened up before his astonished vision? "Behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha." Again the prayer of faith is offered up, "Smite this people, I pray thee, with blindness" (ver. 18); and again the fervent effectual prayer of the righteous man availeth much, "*And He smote them with blindness according to the word of Elisha.*" And now the enemy is caught in one of his own meshes,—"the deceived and the deceiver are the Lord's." Terrified, confused, and helpless, the vast armament follow the guidance of the very man *whom* they were seeking. What

else could they do, as *blind*, but listen to the caustic offer of one who could *see*? “This is not the way, neither is this the city : follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom ye seek.” (Ver. 19.) And so, as sheep to the slaughter, they are quickly led into the midst of the slaughter-house. The goal is reached, and once more is the appeal made to Jehovah, Lord of hosts, “Open the eyes of these men, that they may see.” (Ver. 20.) It is done. “And the Lord opened their eyes, and they saw,” and with feelings of inexpressible terror and amazement, “behold, they were in the *midst of Samaria*.” What a scene to have witnessed! The ear can almost realize the heavy tramp of the armed host, as they approached the city of their foe, with Elisha at their *head*. The mind can partly imagine the surprise and excitement of the inhabitants, when the watchmen from the walls first gave notice of the strange array and unlooked-for company;

and when the scouts, sent to ascertain the real state of the matter, would have returned with the news that the mighty warriors were no better than *unarmed men*, and utterly defenceless, one can see the whole city, men, women, and children, rushing from the gates to see the wondrous sight. The conciseness of Scripture narrative leaves all this for the mind of the reader to fill in, and it may easily be supplied to a much larger extent by any who will grasp the subject, and try to write upon the tablet of their imagination the stirring scene.

The King of Israel, as might be expected, is well pleased with the easy conquest, and is ready enough to fly upon the spoil. “My father, shall I smite them? shall I smite them?” is his quick demand. But *why* ask at all? Was he *not the King?* Who could hinder him? None but *the Lord*. He had them in his power, and his followers would be ready to second his commands; but the truth is, the King’s

power here was limited. The miracle was so palpable, as well as *wonderful*, that all, even the most hardened, would be filled with a passing awe and reverence; the prophet would be looked up to as the practical leader in what was to be done, and his orders would, for the present at least, be obeyed by acclamation. The King felt it, and hence the question. His dastardly spirit—for such an aspect it certainly wears on this occasion—would have fallen upon the defenceless host, and would have put them to the sword with as little remorse as so many wild cattle; but Elisha was of another mind, even the mind of a greater than *he*, whose generous benevolence he here shadowed out. He replied, “Thou shalt *not smite* them: wouldest thou smite those whom thou hast taken captive with thy sword and with thy bow?” (Ver. 22.) Even in hand-to-hand fight, quarter is granted when submission has been tendered; how much more, when a host is thine without striking a blow?

But *more*. Not only shalt thou spare them, not only shalt thou not lay hand upon them, but thou shalt feed them, supply them with needful refreshment, and set them at liberty and dismiss them to their homes, impressed, if it may be, with a vivid conception of the merciful liberality of Israel's people and Israel's God. "Set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink, and go to their master." (Ver. 22.)

We are not told how this generous proposal was relished by the King, or by certain of his subjects; we are not informed of what was probably the case, how some were grievously disappointed of the prey, how others railed against the order as positively foolish and self-destroying, how some of the wise and politic of this world would plead for their being disarmed and imprisoned, or at least ransomed at a good price. There can hardly have been otherwise than many conflicting opinions, while a small band of the merci-

ful and noble-minded and *loving* people of God would rejoice in the prophet's *decision*. Scripture is silent, also, on *all this*; it simply gives us the *result*. Elisha's determination was of God, and so He brought *it to pass*. The King "prepared great provision for them: and when they had eaten and drunk, he sent them away, and they went to their master." (Ver. 23.)

Let us now draw one or two reflections from the prophet's doings on this occasion. And,

1st. Mark the honour put upon *prayer* here. It was the secret of Elisha's strength: he can do *nothing without it*; he can do *everything with it*. *Three* times it is recorded that the prophet poured out his heart to God in prayer. 1st, that the eyes of his servant might be opened, and "*the blind see*;" 2d, that the eyes of the enemy might be shut, and the *seeing made blind*; and 3d, that the Lord would restore their sight, when the end was gained, and they were entrapped in Samaria. And

observe how every prayer was granted ! It is the *want* of faith that keeps the *unconverted prayerless*; it is the *weakness* of faith that keeps the *converted* from *realizing great ends by prayer*. Let the former now present consider the dishonour they put on what God highly honours. You are in the house of prayer, you have joined with your lips in a sound *form* of prayer, and yet are, in his sight, as the *prayerless ones*, because you are without *faith in prayer*. Therefore you know not the *value*, you care not for the *privilege*, of *prayer*. You may think it very proper to go through the form once a-week in public, but to its exercise in the family or in the closet you are almost or altogether a stranger. Now, what you want for your soul's health is the *spirit of grace and of supplication*. Remember how Saul the *Pharisee* offered up many prayers before he became *Paul* the Christian ; and yet it is never recorded of him that he prayed until after his conversion, when

No. IX.

THE SPECIAL PROVIDENCE OF JEHOVAH ILLUSTRATED.

2 KINGS VIII. 4.

“And the king talked with Gehazi the servant of the man of God, saying, Tell me, I pray thee, all the great things that Elisha hath done.”

“Ἄρκει σοι ἡ χάρις μου.”

We approach, in this chapter, the end of Elisha's wondrous but most useful career. His days are now perceptibly numbered, and one more recorded event, and he passes from the scene of this world. The text presupposes that the reputation of Elisha was established as a great and holy man; for the inquiry of the King is,

“ Tell me all the *great things* that Elisha hath done.” The circumstances connected with this inquiry are too remarkable to be passed over in the attempt to direct your minds to some of the most striking incidents in the prophet’s life. The question of the King is introductory to an interesting illustration of the working of Divine providence, in bringing together persons and things in a most unexpected manner, to the furtherance of the ends of justice and the promotion of honesty. We are here also recalled to an old acquaintance, of whom we have heard nothing in the prophet’s history for some years, namely, the pious Shunammite; but, although we find no record of herself and family during this interval, it is clear that her acquaintance with Elisha had been kept up, and that he may have been her counsellor and guide in many a difficult position. Such a position was now hers, and it appears that his regard for her family was equally strong, and his friendship

equally sincere ; for they are again introduced to our notice in a time of extremity.

A prolonged famine of *seven* years is approaching. Elisha *knows* it ; for “the Lord had called for it.” (Ver. 1.) A partial famine for a brief space had already been endured at the hands of man —the *Syrian* enemy during the siege of Samaria. It does not appear to have worked any good effect in humbling the nation and in bringing it to repentance, so, as the smaller judgment is unheeded, the Lord will send a greater, and the temporary famine of a few months shall be changed into a permanent famine for seven years. And let us not omit to observe how *partial* this visitation is to be. The *good land*, the most fruitful of all lands, is to be blasted with its desolating evidence, while, but a few score miles away, in the country of the Philistines, there is *plenty*. Surely “the Lord doth make a fruitful land barren, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein”

(Ps. cvii. 34); and his providence can as easily give plenty *here* and *want* there, as the *day* succeeds the night and the night the day, even as He teaches by Amos (iv. 7), “I have withholden the rain from you, when there were yet *three months* to the harvest: and I caused it to *rain upon one city*, and caused it not to *rain upon another city*: one piece was rained upon, and the piece whereupon it rained not withered. So two or three cities wandered unto one city, to drink water.” Thus it was here; for Elisha, summoning the Shunammite to his presence, forewarns and advises her concerning the coming straitness, “Arise, and go thou and thine household, and sojourn wheresoever thou canst sojourn.” (Ver. 1.) He does not expressly tell her where to go, but leaves that, under God, to her own choice—“sojourn wheresoever thou canst sojourn;” and she, looking around, finds that the land of the Philistines presented the most eligible spot to obtain sustenance and

security for herself and family; and, therefore, she “went with her household, and *sojourned in* the land of the Philistines *seven years.*” (Ver. 2.) And we can readily see what an advantage the fore-knowledge of Elisha would have secured. It would enable the family to make a suitable disposition of property, while plenty was still in the land, and the coming famine hidden from the people at large; and thus she could take enough with her for their support in the land of the Philistines during that lengthened period. And thus we may again notice how the Lord repaid her faith and affection for his servant, and how she who “had received a prophet in the name of a prophet, had” once more “a prophet’s reward.” (Matt. x. 41.)

Well, *time*, that never stands *still*, pursued its course—the chariot of ages, that runs its race with steady but unvarying progress, reached the end of the judgment—and the *seven years* had passed. What

happened during that period we do not learn. How her son had grown to man's estate, and was now probably her stay and comfort in the land of the stranger; whether she had any more children; how it fared with her husband and household;—these and other little matters which in human biography soon fill a volume, are all left to the imagination, and we are only told, “It came to pass at the seven years' end, that the woman returned out of the land of the Philistines: and she went forth to cry unto the King for her house and for her land.” (Ver. 3.)

And now the remarkable providence of Jehovah meets our eyes. The King, we may charitably hope, had profited by the Divine visitation, and he who cared little for the Lord and his servants during comparative prosperity is anxious to hear about the great prophet in “the day of his distress.” Or, if we would take the more unfavourable view of this proceeding, we may suppose that mere curiosity, in an

idle moment, prompted the King to request of Gehazi the leper an account of “all the *great things Elisha had done;*” and it is not unlikely that Gehazi had been admitted into the “*presence*” at a suitable distance on some matter of the ceremonial law appertaining to the King’s jurisdiction, and the monarch, learning who Gehazi was, and how his leprosy had been acquired, took the opportunity of hearing some facts about his late master from the discarded servant.

And was Gehazi, though now a leper in body, a penitent in heart, and clean in soul? Had the fearful correction administered to his sin *wrought* a salutary end? It is an interesting thought that “the destruction of the flesh may have been the salvation of the spirit” (1 Cor. v. 5); but it can only be a thought, for the Scripture is silent. We may, however, hope the best; and the fact that Gehazi related to the King the most striking of Elisha’s mighty deeds at least favours the

presumption that he bore no *malice*, nor was actuated by any spirit of revenge against his late master, and that he did not add to his sin the ingratitude of detraction. But, be this as it may, how manifest are the leadings of a *special* providence ! that just at the moment when Jehoram is listening attentively to this surprising account from Gehazi's lips, and is perhaps wanting a confirmation of the wonder in his *heart*—just at this *precise moment*, when he was telling the King “ how the prophet had restored a dead body to life ” (ver. 5)—the Shunammite herself enters the Court: “ Behold, the woman, whose son he had restored to life, cried to the King for her house and for her land.”

There are two inquiries on which a few words may here be said :—

- I. Was it a matter of chance ? and
- II. Was it an event in any wise improbable and unworthy of credit ?

I reply in the negative to each inquiry

It was not a matter of *chance*. No converted man would for an instant yield to such an imagination ; but there are many nominal Christians who think and speak of such events as if they were but a lucky or unlucky combination of accidents, as the case may *touch them*. Why was it not a matter of chance ? Because to cherish the supposition is to dethrone Jehovah from his supreme seat of absolute control over all things, as well as all *creatures*, living. If we calmly reflect awhile on the point, such an argument at once places all secondary causes, such as the elements, the seasons, the maladies, and other external movements affecting outwardly the human family, as well as the motives and influences bearing upon the internal economy of man, beyond the inclination of the almighty God over all. These are all taken out of his cognisance and management, and are left to a chapter of chances—in a word, they are mingled together in a maze of inexpressible con-

fusion, out of which they are to be unravelled by a jumble of contingencies, without any sole controlling disposition. It is much the same in probability as if an individual were to argue that the works of a watch would go forward, and the wheels run their regular course, without any mainspring to set them in motion. As opposed to such a view, nothing that happens can possibly be a matter of *chance* in a believer's eye. His own experience would contradict the opinion, if he had not the word of Jesus to sustain it. "Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered." (Luke xii. 6, 7.) He will fully believe that it was the superintending providence of the Lord—it was the ever-watchful eye of One who "never slumbers nor sleeps"—which arranged and perfected this kind and beneficial meeting, in order that the desolate and the friendless might obtain justice from a

tribunal on which was often enacted the scene of the unjust judge.

Weigh this point well, brethren. Let all who trust in a special providence be strengthened and encouraged in such a trust Godward by the coincidence which elicited so happy an issue to the pious Shunammite. Let it confirm your faith in the leadings of your covenant God through the wilderness, and so enable you more *confidingly* than you have ever yet done to carry out the admirable direction of the proverb, "*Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not to thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths.*" (Prov. iii. 5, 6.) Let it have a more pressing impulse on your spirit, to consult Him at all times about all affairs, purposes, and undertakings, and to do this specially and specifically, as if you were seeking and receiving directions from a superior, a parent, an elder, or a teacher, and you were most anxious to know how

every step of your way should be ordered. It is thus an apostle has taught, “Be *careful* for nothing.” And *why*, why this apparently paradoxical injunction? Because of what follows: “But *in everything* by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.” (Phil. iv. 6.) If you do this, you may be quite certain—certain as you are a living being at this moment—that you shall be *guided*, and *guided aright*; that “thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left” (Isa. xxx. 21); for “the sons of God are led by the Spirit of God.” (Rom. viii. 14.)

And let all who are sceptical of this fact, and who *practically* have no trust in a special providence be won upon to see the manifest inconsistency of such an opinion with a profession of Christianity. You confess to being a follower of Him who has said, “The very hairs of your

head are all numbered ; " and yet you have no faith in his *assurance*. See also the unreasonableness of your opinion. If things happen by a jumble of chances and unarranged contingencies, then what is the practical use of your *profession* at all ? Where is the utility, or wherein the wisdom, of our meeting together in public worship, and uttering together, and sealing with an Amen, such beautiful expressions of faith in a special providence as this :—" O Lord, our heavenly Father, Almighty and everlasting God, who hast safely brought us to the beginning of this day ; defend us in the same with thy mighty power ; and grant that this day we fall into no sin, neither run into any kind of danger ; but that all our *doings* may be ordered by *thy governance*, to do always that is righteous in thy sight ; through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Third Collect, for Grace.) Where *is our* God, if such be not our faith ? " Either He is talking, or He is pursuing, or He is on a

journey, or peradventure He sleepeth, and must be awaked." (1 Kings xviii. 27.) He is neither here nor there, nor occupied in anything, according to such a view. He is letting *things take their chance*. He is leaving you, and society around you, to work out aims and ends in your own *ways*, while He, shrouded in abstract, inaccessible majesty, contents himself with the preservation of our planet in its course round the sun, if haply even that prerogative be accorded Him. Further, see what you lose by such an opinion—what comfort, what quiet of mind, what ease of heart, what sense of security, what deliverance "from fear of evil tidings!" what a delightful perception of an unseen but ever-present arm, encircling your path "round *about*, even as the mountains are round about Jerusalem!" (Ps. cxxv. 2.)

Study the characters and events of Scripture,—that wondrous history, for instance, of a special providence in the life of a Joseph or an Esther. What a

mine of intelligence on this point is contained in the assurance of the forgiving brother, “Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God *did send me before you to preserve life*” (Gen. xlv. 5); or, again, “But as for you, *ye thought to do me evil; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.*” (Gen. l. 20.) Weigh these events, and compare them with your own experience of life, and you will surely see, God willing, the *inconsistency*, the *unreasonableness*, and, above all, the detriment and discomfort to yourself, as well as the *indignity* to a God whose eyes are ever upon the ways of the children of men, in holding and cherishing so untenable a view.

II. But was this unexpected meeting an event in any wise *improbable* and unworthy of credit? A brief examination of the narrative may anticipate such a thought, and prevent its entertainment.

There are many here who have experienced, to say the least, *occurrences* quite as *improbable* as this. All the circumstances are natural and consistent. What more *natural* than the Shunammite, finding on her return to her own country that her "house and her land" had been appropriated by another, should at once seek the King's presence, and "cry unto him" for the restoration of her rights? and what more *consistent* than the fact of such a presence being sought, and such a petition being offered, at a time when, as we have seen, his Majesty was probably holding a Court, and Gehazi was admitted for some like end? The result may be viewed as almost a necessary consequence. The appearance of the Shunammite at the very moment when he was telling the King of the raising of her son was just the thing Gehazi would have desired, and, being accompanied by her *son*, confirmed his *story* in all *its parts*; and he therefore quickly points her out, so soon as her

form came to his eye, with the self-satisfied avowal, “*My lord, O King, this is the woman, and this is her son, whom Elisha restored to life.*” (Ver. 5.)

The King, arrested by the singular coincidence, and struck by this unexpected confirmation, is at once predisposed to lend a favourable ear to the Shunammite’s prayer, and so, with the characteristic decision of a despotic judgment, commands an officer to see not only “her house and her land” restored, but even “all the fruits of the field since the day that she had left” (ver. 6); and he thus forestalled all special pleading which the party in possession might have offered in mitigation, or in opposition to so peremptory a judgment. The decision was in accordance with the instructions given to Israel’s judges: “Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy. Deliver the poor and needy from out of the hand of the wicked.” (Ps. lxxxii. 3, 4.)

This happy result is calculated to strengthen the faith of all who can feel, with the apostle, that "the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness." (1 Cor. iii. 19.) And it may impress upon the penitent soul the comfort of what follows: "Let no man glory in men. For all things are yours; the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's." One who can grasp this fact in his inmost heart can indeed realize the persuasion of the Psalmist (xci. 1), "He that dwelleth in the *secret place* of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." He feels that whatever seems to make against him is really working for him, and he learns from the history of Joseph that the most heartrending bereavement may be the very means of eventual life and health.

Cherish, beloved brethren, such a trust

in the living God. It will sanctify every *event* of your life ; it will *moderate* its joys ; it will *mitigate* its *sorrows* ; it will quicken *activity*, while it will temper *hastiness* ; it will arouse *indolence*, while it will moderate *zeal* ; above all, it will ever impart *contentment with results*, whatever may be the disappointment by the *way*.

But again : this happy end to the Shunnammite will not, I fear, correct the error of those who are sceptical and incredulous of a special providence. The very circumstance of the *means* by which it was compassed being natural and probable will, strange to say, often have the effect of hardening the mind against better impressions. It is thus that *extremes* so frequently meet, and exhibit a character of most perplexing inconsistency. The *incredulous* in what is *probable* will be the most *credulous* in what is *improbable* ; and the man who rejects the workings of Divine providence in *natural* and *common events*

will be the foremost to receive, aye, and to contend for, those workings in *unnatural* and uncommon *events*. Thus, a heathen will, as Ezekiel describes, “use divination” “at the parting of the way, at the head of the two ways,” to know which to take; “he will make his *arrows* bright, he will consult his images, he will look in the liver” (Ezek. xxi. 21); and thus an ignorant and superstitious but nominal Christian will have recourse to the turning of a pack of cards, or the winding of tea-leaves round a teacup, or the lines in the hand, sagely pronounced upon by a mysterious operator, while they would openly scoff at, or in heart ridicule, the notion of *immediate direction* being given to man at a throne of grace in answer to effectual, fervent prayer. So members of corrupt and fallen Churches will credulously accept “signs and lying wonders,” and with “strong delusion will believe a lie;” and the followers of the false prophet will implicitly receive all the

supposed revelations of the impostor Mohammed, and will view man as abandoned to the influence of a dire and inevitable necessity, whereby all rational freedom of will is excluded, and moral responsibility totally annihilated ; while the one and the other are incredulous of any special *communication from* the Deity in answer to their own humble prayers, and are strangers to any personal comfort from communion with the Father of our spirits in and through his dear Son, who died for our sins, and now ever liveth to make intercession for us.

Now, what do these *facts* prove ? Can they not demonstrate to *you*, if you will but allow reason its fair claim, who disbelieve or despise a special providence, that, while you reject that most *comforting* doctrine, you are a prey and a victim to other most destroying and *unsatisfying* doctrines—*doctrines* which stamp you as one deceived with marvellous *incredulity*.

Brethren, suffer the full and plain

meaning of the apostle to sink into your hearts, and you may soon be aroused out of a fatal *unbelief* :—“ That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him, though He be not far from every one of us : for in Him we live, and move, and have our being.” (Acts xvii. 27, 28.) Ponder these words.

No. X.

ELISHA AT DAMASCUS.—THE DECEITFULNESS OF SIN.

2 KINGS VIII. 7, 8.

“ And Elisha came to Damascus; and Ben-hadad the king of Syria was sick; and it was told him, saying, The man of God is come hither. And the king said unto Hazael, Take a present in thine hand, and go, meet the man of God, and inquire of the Lord by him, saying, Shall I recover of this disease ? ”

“ Αρκεῖ σοι ἡ χάρις μου.”

FIDELITY to God and man will eventually overcome all difficulties, and will frequently secure the personal respect and protection of even open and determined enemies. Thus it happened with Elisha.

We may well feel surprised at the information in the text: “And Elisha *came to Damascus*”—to Damascus, the capital of the constant enemy of Israel, and the residence of its *monarch*. Elisha approached the dwelling of the King of Syria, and put himself in the hands of the man whom he had so often provoked by giving information of his secret designs to Jehoram, “by telling the king of Israel,” as one of Syria’s lords suggested, “the things which Ben-hadad spake in his bed-chamber” (2 Kings vi. 12), and for the apprehension of whom a great host of chariots and horses (2 Kings vi. 14) were not deemed more than enough; and *now* the individual is seen, of his own mind and will, paying a visit to Damascus. Is not this a surprising fact? It shows how the providence of Jehovah can overrule characters and circumstances so as to compass events the most unforeseen and *improbable*. It marks also how the reputation of the prophet was established—

not only in his own land, but throughout the neighbouring lands; so that he who had been treated as the off-scouring of the earth could now peaceably walk the streets of his enemies' capital.

And here an interesting question is suggested to the mind—viz., Where was Naaman all this time? We have heard nothing of him since his *miraculous* cure. Is he still alive? Is he yet in favour with his master? Has he been enabled to preserve his integrity, and to serve the God of Israel in the midst of his heathen countrymen? And if an affirmative reply could be given to these questions, has the presence and the influence of the favourite Naaman, “who *was* a great man with his master, and honourable,” exhibiting that integrity and consistency of conduct which his new faith would supply, caused Ben-hadad to respect, if he would not adopt, the worship of the *true* God? Is the *inference* improbable that Naaman had softened matters down, and, by a fearless

testimony of his own cure, and of his own faith in Israel's God, had so far changed the king's mind as to produce a toleration, at least, of the worship of Jehovah? And has the *grateful* nobleman thus been instrumental in procuring a safe-conduct for Elisha during his visit? And has that visit been promoted from the natural desire to strengthen the hands of the new convert, and to give him the further instruction and comfort which a few hours' or days' intercourse could so readily impart? Such a conclusion, if granted, renders the otherwise unaccountable appearance of the prophet in the heart of Syria easy and natural. And how warm will have been the greeting, and how great the delight, of Naaman and his servants, in rendering honour to the benefactor, and in paying him all the respects of a hearty and reverential welcome. These are but conjectures, it is true; but they are, nevertheless, pleasing and not unlikely conjectures; and the

only circumstance which seems to mak against them is, that another individual Hazael, is now the Prime Minister, and apparently Commander-in-Chief to Ben-hadad. But Naaman may have honourably retired, to enjoy in private that leisure and peace which his past wars had well earned, and his services merited. Behold, then, Elisha at *Damascus*, and behold also that his arrival is opportune and seasonable, for “the king of Syria was sick; and it was told him, saying, The man of God is come hither” (ver. 7); a very natural piece of information for the attendants to convey; for would they not justly suppose that he who had cured Naaman might cure their master also? The king appears of a like mind, or, if he does not look to the prophet for the direct cure of his illness, honours him as able to foretel the *result*, at the least; and so he issues his orders—“Take a present in thine hand, and go, meet the man of God, and inquire of the Lord by

him, saying, Shall I *recover of this disease?*" (Ver. 8.) (And observe, in passing, Ben-hadad's *acknowledgment of the true God*, in confirmation of the above.) Shall I *recover of this disease?* Oh! the *weakness* of man! The mighty king is beholden to the once persecuted prophet for a question which pressed upon his spirit with leaden weights,—Shall I live, or shall I die? Who of human kind has not experienced, or may not experience, a like anxiety? How often is the countenance of the physician narrowly scrutinized to discover his opinion of the sufferer's case? How is the languid eye for a moment lightened up with intense *interest*, while it pierces the changes of the face? As the examination proceeds, you may read in that eye, as plainly as if uttered by the lips, the question of intense anxiety,—Shall I recover of this disease? And it is a question marked down by the pen of inspiration as not inapplicable under certain restrictions to the

tried believer, when addressed to the Physician of physicians—He who can heal all *maladies*—“Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am,” or what time I have here. (Ps. xxxix. 4, margin.)

The commission is executed. Hazael follows his master’s instructions, and, reaching the presence of Elisha, makes the inquiry, in the very words of the king, “Thy son Ben-hadad king of Syria hath sent me to thee, saying, Shall I recover of this disease?” (Ver. 9.) A reply is rendered instantly. It is plain that the prophet has been fully given to see all that will happen. “And Elisha said unto him, Go, say unto him, Thou mayest certainly recover: howbeit the Lord hath showed me that he shall *surely* die.” (Ver. 10.) What does he mean? “He may *certainly recover*, and yet he *shall die*.” Is this to be viewed as the language of the Delphin oracle, of the

Pagan sibyl, who, when no difficulty clogged the question, was wont to give a clear and explicit *reply*, but in cases of a complicated or doubtful character the answer was ever proportionately equivocal, and admitting of a double *interpretation*? No. Elisha was not one of this stamp. The reply was *perfectly consistent*—“Thou mayest certainly recover of the *disease*.” It is not a mortal *disease*—not a *sickness* unto death; and, were it allowed its natural course, thou wouldest soon be well again. But the hand of a murderer shall *prevent* this. Thine own friend and confidential attendant will compass what the disease could not have *compassed*—even *thy death*. “Howbeit the Lord *hath showed* me that he shall *surely die*; and he”—*i.e.*, Hazael—“settled his countenance stedfastly, until he *was ashamed*.” (Ver. 10.) The murderer perfectly understood the reply. It was in exact accordance with his own *pre-determined* purpose; and he dwelt

upon it with *intensity* of mind, so that his face exhibited all the signs of a fixed resolution, until at length the sorrowful expression of Elisha's looks recalled him to his position; and then “he *was ashamed*”—his conscience told him that the prophet could read his heart—and for a moment he shrunk from the inspection. So it was with Judas, the familiar friend of the Blessed One. He had made up his mind to betray his Lord and Master; but it was only when that Lord and Master had given him the sop, and, looking him through and through, had uttered the words, “That thou doest, do quickly” (John xiii. 27),—it was only then that the determination reached its *climax*, and “he went immediately out” (John xiii. 30), and *did the deed*. And thus sinners have convictions beforehand of the sins they are meditating, and of their *sinfulness*. But too often the merciful premonition is unheeded, and, instead of deterring from the commission, only

fixes the resolution and prompts to decided action. It was so with Hazael. After receiving from Elisha some further information of his future proceedings, and horrified at the description, confidently protesting that he never could be guilty of such atrocious wickedness, he returned to his master, and quietly assured him, in the words of Elisha, of his certain recovery : “ He told me that thou shouldest *surely recover.*” (Ver. 14.) Then, with deliberate and deadly intent, while his unconscious victim, soothed by the announcement, was probably steeped in the forgetfulness and helplessness of sleep, so refreshing, and so conducive to his restoration, the murderer “ took a thick cloth, and dipped it in water, and spread it on his face, so that he died.” (Ver. 15.) He died by *suffocation.*

What improvement may we gather from the narrative ? Does it not suggest a *fact* on which a few words may profitably be

added—viz., the *deceitfulness of sin* in the *unconverted*.

1st. It is an error to suppose that unconverted people are *without convictions of sin*. I believe no man lives through his life without convictions of sin some-when. I believe there is not an individual in *this* congregation who has not experienced, or who will not experience, convictions of sin. Such convictions may vary according to circumstances, but they are often very painful and distressing to the conscience while they last. “The commandment comes” (Rom. vii. 9), and comes with a power which makes the sinner tremble as if before the judgment-seat. Sin is seen in a way it never was seen before,—it is no longer viewed as a mere accident common to humanity, and to be more or less excused because it cannot be helped; but it is felt, both in its present effects and in urgent fear of impending consequences, to be “*an evil*

and a bitter thing ;" its moral injustice is appreciated, and the law of God is allowed to be "holy, just, and good." So far, conviction of sin has wrought well. There is a desire to have done with it ; and the individual promises to himself that he will arise and amend his way. And why does he *not do so*? Why does he not carry out his *good intentions*, and evidence that he is a new man by a new life? Because "of the *deceitfulness of sin*"—because of the mighty difference between *conviction of sin* and *conversion from sin*—because of the moral inability which he feels to put into actual practice his new and better purposes. Oppressed as he is with the satiety ever attendant upon the gratification of sin and conformity to this present world,—wearied with the indulgence of its pleasures and the burden of its cares, he is ready to cry out, "O wretched man that I am!" (Rom. vii. 24.) But here he stops short —here his efforts *end*. And so he fails

of escape when in the very way of escape, and he cannot add with the apostle, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Rom. vii. 25.) He cannot summon resolution to enter the strait and narrow path of life, and, while approving of a *better*, he continues in a *worse way*, and settles down into a state of quiescent helplessness — of despairing moral *inability*.

Brethren, have you ever experienced such a state of mind? Can you place your finger on a point of your existence when "your sin did find *you* out"—when you felt something of its moral *turpitude* and ingratitude—when, for a little while, you were really anxious about your soul? Then the Spirit of God *has striven with you*—the Saviour's grace has *yearned* over you—the love of the Father has momentarily reached you; and can it be that all this has been hitherto in vain? Can it be that, after a few short struggles with good convic-

tions—after a brief parley with *wholesome advice*, with virtuous example, with earnest expostulation—your wavering mind has broken down, and you have determined to be troubled no more with such unpleasant sensations and wrestling feelings, but to live and die as you are. Then, I say, you are a living evidence of “*the deceitfulness of sin.*” Or is it that, having been aroused out of a life of worldly vanity—having felt the *importance* of religion, and having now an earnest desire to secure salvation, you have betaken yourself to a round of ritual observances and outward ceremonies, “which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body”? (Col. ii. 23.) You have adopted what is called a Church system, and are satisfied. Then let me point out to you, earnestly but affectionately, “*the deceitfulness of sin.*”

Your *convictions* have *been good*, but you have not followed them up to the

fountain-head, “the blood of Jesus Christ, which (alone) cleanseth from all sin.” (1 John i. 7.) You are mending the tattered raiment of your own filthy righteousness by patching it with personal *satisfactions* and meritorious *services*, which virtually eclipse the work of the Saviour, and prevent this Sun of Righteousness rising on the horizon of your soul, “with healing in his wings.” (Mal. iv. 2.) I am fearful there are many, very many, in our own communion who have been, at some moment of their lives, earnest about their souls, and have *satisfied* that earnestness by a mere change from a careless and inconstant attendance on the means of grace to a punctual and conscientious observance of them; and they *rest in* that *change*, and think that all is well, while there has been no real work of the Holy Spirit in their hearts, nor any moral difference in their lives; they are as much *of the world*, as well as *in the world*, as *before*, and as far from any spiritual de-

light in the law of God—from any spiritual outpourings of the soul, whereby we cry, “*Abba, father*” (Rom. viii. 15)—from any actual deliverance from “*the bondage of corruption*”—from any perceptible appreciation of the glorious liberty of the sons of God—from any fellowship of the Spirit, any consolation in Christ, any comfort of love, as when they *flitted on their way* like any Gallio, “caring for none of these things.” I believe also that most of the perverts from our Church to the Romish communion have been of this class of character. They have become alarmed or anxious in some way about their souls; they have felt a want of something which they think the simple service of their own Church does not supply; the Church of Rome meets this want with its seductive influences—the charm of the confessional and priestly *absolution*, the assurance of ultimate salvation to every member who outwardly practises what

the Church and the priest orders, its gorgeous ritual, its attractive music, its glittering vestments, its sensuous incense, and its sparkling lights, fascinate the eye and entrance the ear, and the once-awakened soul surrenders itself under “*the deceitfulness of sin*” to this imaginary safe conduct through time to eternity.

2dly. Again, “*the deceitfulness of sin*” over the unconverted is seen in their blindness to its *degrees* and *consequences*. Experience proves that sin not only always finds its victim *out*, but is always productive of *deadly consequences*. “*The wages of sin is death.*” (Rom. vi. 23.) The unconverted do not think so—do not believe so. When the end of indulgence in sin is *pointed out*, they argue against such a *conclusion*. They will deny that it has any necessary connexion with their sin—that, however such a course has reached that end with others, it will not be so *with them*—they have found out a

way whereby their will can be gratified and all such evil consequences parried, and they are not merely incredulous, but indignant at the thought of such a contingency ever befalling them. While thus dealing with the consequences of sin, they are *equally* deceived as to the *degrees* of sin. They are positive as to the *lengths* they will go in sin. When these are pointed out as likely to attain a certain head—when it is demonstrated that the beginning of sin, like the “beginning of strife,” is as when “one *letteth out* water” (Prov. xvii. 14), the spirit, if not the very words of Hazael, will rise up—“But *what*, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?” (Ver. 13.) The discernment of Elisha foresaw that it would be done. But would Hazael allow it? Would he suffer himself to admit the possibility? By no means. He is confident he can never proceed to *such lengths*—to such degrees of sin. Hence “the *deceitfulness* of sin.” The uncon-

verted man is blind to two facts:—
1st, As to his utter inability of abstaining from evil and following good. He cannot see, and will therefore in *nowise admit*, that “the Ethiopian may as readily change his skin, and the leopard his spots” (Jer. xiii. 23), as for one who is “*accustomed*”—whose nature is to “do evil,” to alter *that* nature by any *innate* power, and to “*do* good;” and hence, secondly, the misapprehension as to the lengths or *degrees* of sin. The man having this misconception of his own nature, and the power of *that nature*, considers that he can stop in a sinful course just when he pleases—that he can at once arrest his steps, and draw back at the point of danger; and he is to be heard often averring that he will never be seen to progress beyond the limits of worldly prudence and moral decorum. So thought Hazael when sins were mentioned at which the ears of men would tingle. The result is that a loose rein

is given to the cravings of sinful desire,—place is continually allowed to the devil,—evil company and scenes of temptation are freely encountered,—the probability even of a fall is despised, and the necessary contamination laughed at, until it too frequently happens that he who begins to walk only in the counsel of the ungodly goes on to *stand* in the way of sinners, and at last sits down in the seat of the scornful (Ps. i. 1), realizing our Lord's declaration, “Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.” (John viii. 34.) I would particularly warn my younger hearers on this point. Remember, I entreat you, that sin is *progressive*; that many places of resort, which, to the youthful eye, are fascinating, and, to appearance, *harmless*, are the means of engendering tastes and habits which keep you an unconverted soul all *through life*. Remember, also, that the company of some of your own age and station, whose opinions and practices you cannot ap-

prove, and yet you have not the resolution to *decline*, may be the instruments of leading you on to lengths of iniquity, at the thought of which your present mind would absolutely shudder. The apostle speaks to you, when he says, “Take heed lest any of you be hardened through *the deceitfulness of sin.*” (Heb. iii. 13.) Be not ignorant of the devices of the devil (2 Cor. ii. 11), whom, by your baptismal covenant, you have sworn to fight against. See that you have no power to do good or resist sin in your own strength,—that, as our Collect teaches, “We cannot do anything that is good” (Ninth Sunday after Trinity) without aid from above. See that the safety of your soul depends upon your *being* converted to God from the power of Satan—upon your “having a clean heart created within you, and a right spirit renewed within you.” (Ps. li. 10.) Nothing short of this can enable you to “flee youthful lusts, which war against

the soul." (2 Tim. ii. 22.) It is the Holy Ghost, the Third Person in the Blessed Trinity, who alone can work in you "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ;" and when this good work has been done in you, the prayer offered in your behalf at your confirmation should be your prayer without ceasing, viz., "That you may daily increase in his Holy Spirit more and more, until you come to his everlasting kingdom. Amen."

No. XI.

ELISHA HONOURED IN HIS END, AND AFTER DEATH.

2 KINGS XIII. 14.

“Now Elisha was fallen sick of his sickness whereof he died. And Joash the king of Israel came down unto him, and wept over his face, and said, O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof.”

“Αρκεῖ σοι ἡ χάρις μου.”

WE have now reached the concluding scene of Elisha's useful and honourable career, after a series of interesting records and brief touches of his life, deemed fitting by the Spirit of God to be written down for our learning. The prophet has arrived at that goal to which all are hastening; for “it is appointed

unto all men once to die, and after that the judgment" (Heb. ix. 27); he is about to be gathered to his rest, "like a shock of corn fully ripe, and meet for the garner." He would now be about eighty years of age, as it was sixty-five years, by reckoning the periods of the six kings (Ahab, Ahaziah, Jehoram, Jehu, Jehoahaz, Joash) who sat on the throne of Israel during his life, since his first call to the prophetic office by Elijah, and, supposing him to have been a youth of eighteen, while he might have been a man of twenty-five, the above limit would be a low calculation; and is it not pleasing to contemplate so eminent a servant of God ending his days at a good old age in peace, and this in troublous times? The change of dynasty from an Ahab's to a Jehu's race, and the bloody violence attending that change, had no apparent effect upon the prophet's position; he remains the *honourable* and the *honoured*. Yes, it is indeed encouraging, as well as pleasing, to see

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one who has worked on in his place, through ill and through good report—one who has not counted his life dear in the Lord's behalf—at length lifted up above all detraction, all persecution, all *enmity*, and honoured in his latter days as one of “the *salt of the earth.*” Such was Elisha’s happy lot. That his reputation was established as well among the *heathen enemy* as among his own countrymen was shown by his presence at Damascus in peace and at liberty, as noticed in our last. But there is a yet greater respect to be put on his valuable services, and he is to be marked out, before the whole people, as “the man whom the king delighteth to honour.”

In this his time of extremity, when death’s cold hand was upon his enfeebled body, but when, as the passage shows, his *mind* was active and vigorous as ever,—at this time, when frequently neglect and indifference chill the hearts of those who can be no longer publicly useful, Elisha is advertised of the approach of the first

person in the realm. Joash, the grandson of the determined Jehu, comes to take a parting interview, and to receive the prophet's blessing and counsel; and how strikingly appropriate, and at the same time full of practical worth and esteem, is the affecting apostrophe of the concerned monarch! He is led to express his sorrow in the very same words to which Elisha had himself given vent when losing his predecessor, Elijah. "And Joash the King of Israel came down unto him, and wept over his face, and said, O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof." (Ver. 14.)

See how one man of God may be the strength of a kingdom, and not only the salt, but support, of its vitality. Such is the King's mind and the King's judgment, and enough has been recorded of Elisha's usefulness and Elisha's virtue to justify the decision and bear out the eulogium. That the King's visit was altogether worthy of the occasion, that he came with

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no double intention, but in the affectionate warmth of a heart which felt the loss his country was about to sustain, may be inferred from the reception he met with, and the benefit he obtained. The reception that awaited him was altogether *favourable*—a striking contrast to the treatment which Jehoram, as we have seen, experienced at his hands, when the prophet administered to him a rebuke, justly merited by a perverter of the true faith, “What have I to do with thee? get thee to the prophets of thy father, and to the prophets of thy mother.” (2 Kings iii. 13.)

Elisha summons up his remaining strength to encourage the King in the defence of his country; and he “said unto him, Take bow and arrows.” It is done. And he said again, “Put thine hand upon the bow;” and he did it. Then “Elisha put his hands upon the King’s hands” (vers. 15, 16)—a significant action, which might suggest the dependant

and believing mind of David, “Blessed be the Lord my strength, which teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight,” &c. (Ps. cxliv. 1.) Then the window is opened eastward, as towards that part of the country which the fierce Hazael had warred against and smitten; for we read, “Hazael smote them in all the coasts of Israel, from Jordan *eastward*.” (2 Kings x. 32.) Next, “Elisha said, Shoot. And he shot. And he said, The arrow of the Lord’s deliverance, and the arrow of deliverance from Syria: for thou shalt smite the Syrians in Aphek, *till thou have consumed them.*” (Ver. 17.)

Such is the promise, which, when Jehovah pleases, can so easily be performed; for “He sent out his arrows, and scattered them; He shot out lightnings, and discomfited them.” But the promises of God are ever dependant upon the *exertions* and *obedience* of man. So, here, the King met, indeed, with a kind and flattering reception, and he was to be put in the

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way of receiving an *exceeding benefit*—*victory over his enemies* till they were *utterly consumed*. The full extent, however, of this benefit was made dependant upon his faith and energy of mind: even the *King* must be put on his trial. It was a good move on his part to come to the deathbed of a man of God. Much of *permanent* “correction and instruction in righteousness” may be learnt from such scenes; and the interview illustrates the Preacher’s maxim, “It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting.” (Eccl. vii. 2.) And the Lord, by his servant, graciously approved of the act, rewarding him, and leading him on to better things. With this view, the spirit of his inner man is searched and his mind exercised, and he is requested by the prophet to enter on some more figurative actions. “And he said, Take the arrows. And he took them. And he said unto the king,” doubtless with all his remain-

ing energy of voice and expression, “Smite upon the ground. And he smote thrice, and stayed.” (Ver. 18.) As the action was figurative, so it was very significant. It was one of those little straws which indicate the movings of the wind, which mark the *character* of the man; and it was calculated to elicit the measure of confidence and perseverance which Joash possessed. The trial was not in vain; for although *a thrice* was better than a feeble *once*, yet it was not enough, or it was feebly done, and there was irresolution and doubt displayed in the action; for it drew forth the displeasure, instead of approval, of Elisha. “And the *man of God* was *wroth with him*, and said, Thou shouldest have smitten *five or six* times; then hadst thou smitten Syria till thou hadst consumed it: whereas now thou shalt smite Syria *but thrice*.” (Ver. 19.) And again we are reminded of the Preacher’s words, “Whatsoever thy hand findeth

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to do, do it *with all thy might.*" (Eccl. ix. 10.)

Here, then, we may pause, and dwell a while on the useful lesson this *singular trial* teaches, and which all will have in a measure anticipated, viz., the necessity of persevering energy *in a good cause*. How very clear and pointed is the Scripture on this head! Is a child of God in great extremity from the fear of man? Is the reasonable dread of an "offended brother," who "is harder to be won than a strong city," before his eyes? How is the fear removed, and confidence restored to the anxious breast? The patriarch is to be seen wrestling in prayer with a pre-manifestation of the Son of God through the live-long night, and his persevering energy is rewarded in obtaining the blessing, "*For as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed.*" (Gen. xxxii. 28.) Is a prophet in deepest solicitude for the fulfilment of

a prophecy—abundance of rain after three years' dearth? He betakes himself to the top of a mount overlooking the calm, blue surface of the Mediterranean; "he casts himself down to the earth, and puts his face between his knees." He is wrapt in earnest prayer. He pauses, and bids his servant, "Go up now, and look towards the sea." He hopes to be told of clouds rising, and to hear the wind rustling, as the presage of a coming storm. But *no*; the servant returns disappointed: "he went up, and looked, and said, There is nothing." What does the prophet do? Is he cast down with despair? Is he disposed to challenge the fidelity of his Heavenly Master? No. "Go again," is the pertinent enforcement to the wondering dependant,—Go again, and again, and again, and thrice again! And his energy at length reaps the recompense. "It came to pass at the *seventh time*, that he said, Behold, there ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand."

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(1 Kings xviii. 42—44.) In a little while the rain pours down in torrents.

Is a poor widow to be righted of her wrongs, and has she no other *advocate*, no worthier tribunal at which to supplicate, than that of an unjust "*judge*, which feared not God, neither regarded man"? How is she to gain her end? Whence the possibility of success? It is *persevering energy* that does the work, and realizes the end. "Avenge me of mine adversary," is the widow's cry. "And he would not for *a while*," he was in no wise moved by her piteous entreaties; "but afterward," when the widow, nothing daunted, persevered in her application, "he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her *continual coming* she weary me." (Luke xviii. 2—5)

Am I not right, then, in the remark that the Scripture is specially clear and pointed on the necessity of persevering

energy in a good cause? And how is it, then, with us? Some are very persevering in the cause of this world; they are "not slothful in business" (Rom. xii. 11); "they rise early, and late take rest, and eat the bread of carefulness." (Ps. cxxvii. 2.) And are you to be blamed for this industrious energy? I blame you not; for it is written, "That if any man would not work, neither should he eat." (2 Thess. iii. 10.) The idle and the slothful are deservedly left to reap the fruit of their own ways; and if man had only a body, and only one world to live in, I might stop here, and leave you to yourself. But you have, as you professedly acknowledge and confess, a soul as well as a body; and you have, as you professedly acknowledge and confess, another world to live in after this, and that life, in respect of duration, compared with this, is as a drop of water in a vast sea. I am constrained, therefore, to arrest you in your one-sided course—to try and fix in your mind the

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consequences of the life you live here—to try and impress upon your spirit that whatever you *sow* in this world you will *reap* in the next. If you will “sow to the flesh”—if you will only have a care for “what you must eat, and what you must drink, and wherewith you may be clothed”—then you will undoubtedly of such a course “reap corruption.”

What can it profit if you could gain the whole world for your body, and lose your soul? What possible good, beyond a few brief years of solicitous exertion—years, too, perfectly *uncertain in number* and beyond your power to prolong even for an hour—will all your care, and thriftiness, and restless anxiety to yourself and those around you, afford? It cannot procure you, if you attained the very summit of your earthly wishes, one drop of cold water to cool your tongue when tormented in the flame of hell. (Luke xvi. 24.) Will you not, then, take a leaf from the book of Elisha? Will you not

ask yourself, What gave the *holy* man such calm *confidence*, such disinterested self-possession, in the hour of death? He was a *dying man*; his time was come—he was about to enter into the presence of the Omniscient Judge; and still, at this moment of extremity, his whole anxiety is not *for himself*, but for *Israel's* glory. The *bent* of the man's life, the ruling passion of his existence, is seen in his last action; and his only distress, his *only* sorrow, the *only circumstance* that casts a tinge of melancholy over his *countenance*, or draws a word of complaint from his lips, is the unhappy discovery of the monarch of Israel's weakness. His spirit is stirred within him, as when, at the commencement of his ministry, he had exclaimed, “*Where is the Lord God of Elijah?*” (2 Kings ii. 14); and the feelings of his heart cannot be restrained—“*The man of God was wroth with him.*” Mark, then, the whole aim and end of Elisha's life, and

ask candidly of your own self, Whose position would you choose in a dying hour—that of the dauntless and energetic prophet, or that of the weak and hesitating king? And are you a dauntless and energetic character? Are you laying out yourself day after day for advancement in this world? Then ask *yourself* again, For what am I working like unto a slave? For what am I sacrificing comfort, and peace, and health itself? For “the things that *perish* with the using ;” for honour, which, as a bubble, vanishes into airy space ; for *riches*, which make to themselves wings and flee away.

Look at that pale, emaciated figure, in the prime of manhood. He is on the mighty deep. He has the best berth in the ship. He is returning to his native land, laden with the wealth of this world, the fruit of his own persevering energy. Every appliance that money can give is at his command. He hopes the voyage home will restore his health. But *no* ;

every one but himself sees the exact contrary. He grows daily weaker; his attenuated fingers will hardly retain the golden rings with which they are studded. He sits at the daily dinner-table as long as he can hold up. He will never hear a word willingly of sickness or death. Though *eternity* is rapidly approaching, his whole effort is to keep it at arm's length. He clings to *time*, and, whenever what are called serious topics are introduced, he is disturbed, petulant, and even angry. He retires to his cabin one evening more than usually exhausted; cold perspirations are seen on his forehead; the morning's dawn finds him a corpse.* And so utterly blind and self-seeking has he been to the last that, although he often talked to the passengers of his relatives in humble life at home, whom he purposed to surprise and make happy with his bounty, he stu-

* A fact told me by a fellow-passenger from Australia.

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diously refrained from mentioning their place of residence; and nine months after the ship had reached England's shores, no tidings had been gained of them; and it was the firm belief of the fellow-passenger from whom I learnt the above facts that his whole property would fall into the hands of those who had no just claim to its possession.

This incident is nothing surprising; nor is it any very singular occurrence; but it does tell a warning tale,—it does put upon record the utter vanity of things “that *perish with the using*,”—it does speak to the child of the world in the wisdom of God, “Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then *whose shall those things be*, which thou hast provided?” (Luke xii. 20)—it does utter a voice of preventing wretchedness, “Lay not up for *yourselves* treasures upon earth, where rust and moth doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay

up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither rust nor moth doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal." (Matt. vi. 19, 20.) "Provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not." (Luke xii. 33.)

Again, let all who are in earnest about their soul's salvation take a word of instructive warning from the King of Israel's conduct. See how much you may lose for want of hopeful faith, issuing in *decisive energy*. He might have conquered his enemies *utterly*; he now shall smite them *but thrice*. You may have a high vantage-ground opened to your view of spiritual progress—of work for the Lord. The Spirit says, *as it were*, "*Come up! come on!*" but you are fearful, and hesitating; perchance you see "briars and thorns by the way, and are dwelling among scorpions." (Ezek. ii. 6.) You falter, and are dismayed at the enemies' *looks*; you stop short of the

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Lord's requirements, of the Lord's *just expectations*; you "smite thrice, and stay, when you should have smitten *five or six times*;" and the end is, you lose the half of what you might have gained.

See, then, brethren, that you are as persevering, decided, and energetic in *your work* as the *worldling in his*. Oh! let him not shame you in his *forethought*, his *prudence*, his *wisdom*, his apt use of *fitting means*, and specially his *untiring energy* and continual *looking to the end in view*. Let not the Saviour's just reproach fit in with your experience, your mode of life and action, "The *children of this world* are in their *generation wiser* than the *children of light*." (Luke xvi. 8.)

There is one more event to notice in the history of Elisha ere I bring the subject to a conclusion, and it is this—the honour which it seemed good to his Heavenly Master to inscribe on his memory after he was dead and *buried*; as one has said, "Elijah was honoured in

his departure, and Elisha after his departure." "And Elisha died, and they buried him." (Ver. 20.) And, as if the sentiment of the king had been prophetically true, "O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof," no sooner was he gone than evil came upon the land, and the Moabites invaded it, as if *deprived* of its strength and armour. In the confusion arising from this sudden inroad a party were disturbed in paying the last offices of respect to a *departed brother*. In the hurry of surprise they cast the body into the sepulchre of Elisha, and once more does the prophet speak, "though he were dead;" for "when the man was let down, and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived, and stood upon his feet." (Ver. 21.) Now, it is possible this miracle may have contributed to the introduction of that grievous error, the *veneration* of relics, of dead men's bones, which has made such way in the cor-

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rupted Churches of the East and West. The houses of prayer were first built on the spots hallowed by the spectacle of a martyr's sufferings, and gradually an association, innocent in itself, grew up into a monstrous system of gross idolatry, relics of all kinds, from a bone to a button, being laid up in the churches, and bowed down to, and worshipped. Be it our wisdom, brethren, to elicit truth and instruction from a fact which has so ministered to error and subversion. Be it ours to gather "sweetness from the strong and meat from the eater." Be it ours to realize, in this miracle wrought by Elisha after his death, the great and consoling truth of the resurrection, and of a never-ending life; for surely *operation* infers *existence*, and God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. (Matt. xxii. 32.) Elisha anticipates the life-stirring assurance of Jesus, "He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and be-

lieveth in me shall *never die.*" (John xi. 25, 26.) And may we not further cull this flower of sweet and fragrant comfort from the darkness and silence of the tomb, that as the temporary death of Elisha was the means of giving life to one *dead* body, so the death of Jesus Christ is the means of giving life to millions of dead souls?

Such a truth as this, grasped and applied to the individual heart and conscience by the teaching of the Holy Spirit, can shed a ray of cheering light over the darkest hour of personal tribulation or relative bereavement. In this glorious *fact*, indeed, of light and immortality, the exact suitableness of the Gospel to the necessities of man is most evident and convincing; for if "in this life only we had hope in Christ," we should be of all men most miserable; but when "the means of grace," diligently and prayerfully used, have assured to our souls "the hope of glory," *then*, and not

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till then, is “ death robbed of its sting, and the grave of *its* victory ; ” *then*, and not till then, are the sorrows, and changes, and chances of this mortal life *sanctified*, endured, and blessed in the belief, and sure confidence of a *meeting again to part no more*. This is the use made by the apostle of this most blissful truth, and it is the *use* which every converted man should make of it also,—“ Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by our *gathering together unto Him*.” (2 Thess. ii. 1.) There is great force, inexpressible consolation, in the term, “ our gathering together unto him.” Yes. Then we shall behold not only the Lord we love *face to face*—then shall we see not only the Lamb of God “ as He is, and be like Him,” but we shall behold *Abraham*, and *Isaac*, and *Jacob*, and we shall be “ gathered together ” with *Moses*, *Joshua*, and *David*, and all the “ leaders and commanders of the people ; ” with *Samuel*, *Elijah*, and

Elisha, and all the prophets, apostles, martyrs, saints, and every individual person we have *lived* and had fellowship with in the spirit here on earth,—all, in one united band, and with one mind and one mouth, lifting up the voice of praise, “Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.” (Rev. v. 13.)

Consider, beloved brethren,—consider what *you* are losing, what *you* are renouncing for ever and ever, *who* are yet unconverted, yet “dead in trespasses and sins.” Oh! how many who are “gone to their own place” would now give worlds upon worlds to have the touch of *Elisha* to bring them upon earth again, if haply they could but have one more opportunity of closing with the Gospel—one more option of replying to the invitation of Jesus, “Come,” I *will come*; “Lord, I believe; help thou *mine* unbelief.” It *cannot be*

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—it is all over *with* them—their state is determined—there remaineth for them no more *offering for sin*. “If thou hadst known, even thou, at *least* in *this thy day*, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are *hid from thine eyes*.” (Luke xix. 42.)

Behold, *now is the accepted time*, now is the day of salvation. Beware lest, like unto Jerusalem, thou art lost, “because thou knowest not the *time of thy visitation*.”





